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Security nightmare as 5L devotees visit Ram Mandi

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Investors' wealth erodes by ₹8.50 L cr as markets tumble

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SPORTS

Djokovic holds off Fritz to reach s/fs for 11th time

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Karpoori Thakur to be awarded Bharat Ratna posthumously

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Former Bihar chief minister and socialist leader Karpoori Thakur will be awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously, the Rashtrapati Bhavan announced on Tuesday. Thakur, popularly known as 'jannayak', served as chief minister from December 1970 to June 1971 and from December 1977 to April 1979 ***—PTI***

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BSF kills B'deshi guard 'disguised as smuggler'

KOLKATA, 23 JAN

A Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) trooper, who was allegedly "disguised as a cattle smuggler", was shot at by the Border Security Force in West Bengal, while trying to sneak out of the country illegally, BSF officials said on Tuesday. The trooper died later, they said.The incident occurred in Bongaon area along the international border in North 24 Parganas district on Monday when a group of Bangladeshi cattle smugglers attempted to cross over to the neighbouring country by breaching the newly constructed barbed wire fence. ***—PTI***

India sends 40K litres of locust pesticides to Afghan

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

In its continued efforts to help Afghanistan, India has supplied 40,000 litres of Malathion a pesticide used to fight locust menace, through the Chabahar port. The Taliban-controlled Ministry of Agriculture has expressed gratitude for this assistance, highlighting its significance in protecting crops and ensuring food security in Afghanistan. Malathion, known for its efficacy in arid regions and minimal water usage, is considered a crucial tool in locust control. The aid not only addresses the immediate threat in Afghanistan but also serves to prevent the spread of locusts to neighbouring Central Asian countries. "Afghanistan is grateful of India for supplying chemical material to prevent the locusts menace, that arrived today through Chabahar port," the Afghanistan Ministry said. ***—PTI***

Clash breaks out as Cong Yatra barred from entering Guwahati

Assam CM orders cops to file FIR against Rahul for 'provoking crowd'

GUWAHATI, 23 JAN

Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra was fraught with confrontation between Congress and Assam government on Tuesday, as Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma directed Director General of Police G P Singh to register a case against the MP for allegedly provoking a crowd to break barricades.

The barricades were erected along a highway to prevent Congress leaders and supporters taking part in the Yatra from entering the main thoroughfares of Guwahati, the largest city of the north-eastern state.

As Congress supporters removed the barricades, a scuffle with the police personnel ensued leading to injuries suffered by state Congress president Bhupen Borah and Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly Debabrata Saikia.

This is the sixth day of the party's Nyay Yatra in Assam.

Addressing the public from atop a bus, Gandhi said that they have broken barricades but 'we will not break the law'.

He alleged that while BJP president JP Nadda was allowed to take the same route earlier, Congress was not permitted.

Youth Congress president Srinivas BV shared on X a video showing Congress workers breaking a barricade. Responding to this, Sarma said that the footage will be used as evidence.

Security personnel attempt to stop Congress workers from crossing police barricades during the latter's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Guwahati on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Sarma said the Yatra would not be allowed to enter the city in order to avoid traffic jams.

The DGP said appropriate lawful action is being taken against those leaders and participants who instigated, led and participated in unlawful activities.

The hurdles for the Yatra in the state reached a flashpoint on Monday when the former Congress president was stopped from going to the birthplace of Assam's iconic Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva at Batadrava in Nagaon district. The neighbouring Morigaon district authorities also barred him from holding street corner meetings and a padyatra.

The Yatra which halted at Meghalaya on Monday night re-entered Assam this morning but the Congress leader claimed that he was not allowed' to interact with students of a private university in Meghalaya at the instructions' of the Union Home minister which was conveyed to the varsity through the Assam chief minister's office.

Gandhi was scheduled to hold separate interactions with students, civil society members and party leaders at the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, in Ri Bhoi district bordering Assam. However, it was cancelled and he addressed students and others from atop his bus at the inter-state border.As his entourage weaved his way towards Guwahati, they came across the barricades at Khanapara area of the city.

During the scuffle, Borah and others tried to push through the barricade when he was hit on his wrist by a police baton and fell down on the road, suffering injuries.

Once back on foot, Borah and others climbed over the barricade and started marching down the road, when Guwahati Police Commissioner Diganta Barah prevented them from proceeding further and, along with other police personnel, tried to push them back.

Congress urges Assam Guv for judicial inquiry into attacks

Leader of the Opposition in Assam legislative Assembly Debabrata Saikia has urged Governor Gulab Chand Kataria to order a judicial probe on the physical assault on state Congress president Bhupen Bora and unruly behaviour of alleged BJP cadres during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

Saikia alleged that the state government is creating "serious administrative blockade and also resorted to unleashing unruly lumpens to sabotage the peaceful Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra by brute of physical force and criminal attack against our senior leaders."

During the yatra on Sunday, the vehicle carrying senior AICC leader Jairam Ramesh was forcefully stopped by supporters of the ruling BJP and they verbally abused him and tore the stickers on his car, he said. *—PTI*

COMMUNAL HARMONY LOST

Visuals from Mira Road where bulldozers have been pressed into action against illegal construction ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

Bulldozer action where clashes over Ram rally occurred

THANE, 23 JAN

"Illegal" roadside stalls in Naya Nagar area of Thane district which witnessed a communal clash two days back were razed by the civic body using bulldozers on Tuesday, officials said.

A huge contingent of police personnel, including a Rapid Action Force (RAF) team, was deployed in the area to avoid any untoward incident. Notably, the action by the Mira Bhaindar Municipal Corporation to demolish the "illegal" roadside stalls came a day after Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who holds the Home portfolio, warned of strict action against rioters. Videos of the razing of the stalls have gone viral on social media.

Members of two communities clashed during a vehicle rally organised in Naya Nagar on the outskirts of Mumbai on Sunday night on the eve of the consecration of Lord Ram's idol in the Ayodhya temple. A mob armed with iron rods, sticks, and bats shouted religious slogans and assaulted the man whose car was part of the procession comprising three vehicles and 10 two-wheelers, police had said. They vandalised the car with stones and sticks. Police registered a case of attempt to murder against around 60 people and took 13 of them in custody. *—PTI*

3 HELD FOR PUTTING SAFFRON FLAG ON MOSQUE

SHAHJAHANPUR, 23 JAN

Three men were arrested here on Tuesday for allegedly removing a flag from a mosque and replacing it with a saffron flag, a police officer said.

In another incident in Tilhar, police booked five people and 12 others unidentified for allegedly desecrating a flag bearing the name of Lord Ram. Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Meena said, "Some miscreants climbed up a mosque in the Lalbagh area under Ramchandra Mission Police Station Monday night. The accused removed a green coloured flag from the mosque and replaced it with a saffron flag."

Meena said the three men, Ankit Katheria, Rohit Joshi and Rohit Saxena, were arrested at the complaint of local residents. "The accused were arrested on Tuesday and the matter is being investigated," he said.

In Tilhar, Circle Officer Priyank Jain said that the alleged desecration took place in Batlaiya village. *—PTI*

Missing teacher's body buried near K'taka temple

MANDYA, 23 JAN

The body of a 28-year-old teacher of a private school was found buried under the ground near a temple in Melukote area of Mandya district, two days after she went missing, police said on Tuesday.

Deepika V Gowda, a resident of Manikyahalli village of Pandavapura taluk, is survived by her husband and a seven-year-old son, they said.

According to the police, the victim left home around 9 am for school on Saturday. When she did not return home at the expected time, her husband tried to contact her on her mobile which was found to be switched off. When her husband could not find her anywhere, he approached the police on evening following which a missing complaint was lodged.

During a search operation, the police found the victim's two-wheeler near the temple ground. On Monday, when the family members started combing the surrounding area, they sensed a foul smell emanating from a particular area which led them to the body.

They removed the sand underneath and found her dress.

They immediately alerted the police who then recovered the body which was buried under the ground, a senior police officer said.

"No injury marks were visible on the body and as soon as we recovered the body, we shifted it to the nearest hospital for post-mortem. The exact cause of death would be ascertained only after we receive the post-mortem report which is awaited," he said. *—PTI*

IN NETAJI'S HONOUR

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Congress leaders pay tribute to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 127th birth anniversary in Bengaluru on Tuesday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Right-wing men clash with FTII pupils over 'Remember Babri' poster

Members of a local Right-wing organisation clashed with students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) here on Tuesday over a banner condemning the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid put up by the students, police said. The banner with the words "Babri Demolition, Death of Democracy" was put up by the FTII Students Association (FSA) on the campus on Monday.The incident took place a day after the grand consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla idol took place in Ayodhya. *—PTI*

Amid tiff with India, China's ship heads towards Maldives

MALE, 23 JAN

A Chinese ship, equipped to carry research and surveys, will be docking at a Maldivian port after being permitted by the Male government to make a port call for replenishment.

The permission to allow the Chinese ship comes amid strains in ties between India and Maldives after its new President Mohamed Muizzu came to power and made Beijing as his first port of call early this month after assuming office. Traditionally, New Delhi has been the first port of call for a Maldivian President.

Maldivian Foreign Ministry said a diplomatic request was made by the Chinese government for the necessary clearances to make a port call, for rotation of personnel and replenishment.

PHOTO: AP

the statement, however, said the Chinese Research Vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3, will "not be conducting any research while in the Maldivian waters".

Further, the statement said Maldives has always been a welcoming destination for "vessels of friendly countries," and continues to host both civilian and military vessels making port calls for peaceful purposes.

According to Marine Traffic, a private website keeping a watch on movement of ships, the eight-year-old Chinese ship is likely to dock at a Male port on 8 February.

An American think-tank has alleged that a vast fleet of China's "scientific research" ships is collecting data from the oceans, including in the Indian Ocean, for military purposes, especially for submarine operations, a charge denied by Beijing which said the Chinese vessels operations are in line with the UN Convention on Law of the Seas.

The Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance. *—PTI*

MYANMAR PLANE WITH 14 CRASHES IN MIZORAM

AIZAWL, 23 JAN

All the 14 passengers of a small Myanmar military plane had a miraculous escape on Tuesday after the aircraft overshot the tabletop Lengpui airport runway near here and crash-landed into a bush, officials said.

Of the 14 people aboard the plane, including the pilot, eight sustained minor injuries and were treated in a local health centre, they said. The plane had come to take back 92 Myanmarese soldiers who crossed over to India last week, following gunfights with an ethnic insurgent group, they said.

Officials said the Myanmar air force Y-8 cargo plane overshot the tabletop runway of the Mizoram government-run airport around 10.20am and crash-landed into a nearby bush. *—PTI*

2022 KHEDA CASE

SC blasts Guj cops for flogging Muslims

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Supreme Court on Tuesday admonished the Gujarat Police over its officials publicly flogging five people belonging to the Muslim community at a village in Kheda district in 2022, asking angrily from where they drew the authority to tie people to poles and beat them up.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta was hearing an appeal by four police personnel--inspector AV Parmar, sub-inspector DB Kumavat, head constable KL Dabhi and constable RR Dabhi against the 19 October, 2023 order of the Gujarat High Court by which they were sentenced to 14-day simple imprisonment for committing contempt of court for violating the apex court's guidelines about detaining and interrogating suspects.

Five Muslims were allegedly beaten up with batons by the accused policemen, who tied them to a pole. ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

"(Do) you have an authority under law to tie people to a pole and beat them? Go and enjoy the custody," Gavai said during the hearing. Severely reprimanding the officials, Justice Mehta said, "What kind of atrocities are these?"

Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for the officials, said they were already facing criminal prosecution, departmental proceedings and an inquiry by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).

"The question here is the high court's jurisdiction to proceed against them in contempt proceedings," Dave said, adding no offence of wilful disobedience was made out against them in terms of the apex court's 1996 verdict in the DK Basu case where it had issued guidelines for making arrest, and detention and interrogation of suspects.

He submitted the question right now was not about the culpability of these officials but the contempt jurisdiction of the high court.

Five Muslims were allegedly beaten up with batons by the accused policemen, who tied them to a pole. The five were among the 13 people picked up for their alleged involvement in throwing stones at a garba event in Undhela village of Kheda district during the Navratri festival in October, 2022. Some villagers and police personnel were reportedly injured. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Davangere couple holds Lord Ram themed wedding

DAVANGERE, 23 JAN

A couple in Davangere on Monday held a Lord Ram-themed wedding to celebrate the Ayodhya temple consecration ceremony. Unable to go attend the Ram Mandir ceremony in Ayodhya, the couple had cut-outs of Lord Ram in the wedding hall at Bapuji Kalyana Mantapam. The atmosphere reverberated with chants of "Jai Shri Rama," as the newlyweds and their families joined in the celebration. *—Salar News*

Toddy tapper falls to death in Karnataka

MANGALURU, 23 JAN

A 58-year-old toddy tapper died after he slipped and fell from a coconut tree in Dakshina Kannada district on Tuesday morning, police said. The deceased has been identified as Vishwambaran, hailing from Dharmasthala. He was a former director of the Konaje Toppy Tappers' Society here. Sources said Vishwambaran had climbed the coconut tree near a house at Somanatha Uliya in Ullal taluk for tapping when he slipped and fell. Ullal police have registered a case. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Drink and drive: 16 school vehicle drivers booked

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

In a special drive against drunk driving, the Bengaluru Traffic Police on Tuesday booked 16 school vehicle drivers who were driving under the influence of alcohol, officials said.As many as 3,414 school vehicle drivers were checked for consumption of alcohol between 7 am and 9.30 am, they said."Out of 3,414 school vehicle drivers, 16 were found positive during test. They were prosecuted under section 279 (Rash driving or riding on a public way) of the Motor Vehicles Act," Joint Commissioner of Police (Traffic) MN Anucheth said.The driving licences of the concerned drivers were sent to respective RTOs for suspension, he said.*—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Koppal to host S India's Kumbh Mela on 28 Jan

KOPPAL, 23 KAN

Koppal is gearing up to host Sri Gavisiddeshwara Jatra, organised by Gavi Mutt (religious fair). Preparations are in full swing for the fair that will be held on 28 January where over 4 lakh mirchis (deep-fried green chillies dipped in gram flour) will be prepared.The fair is also called Kumbh Mela of South India where mirchi is given as an offering to the attendeesMirchi Seva Balagam group will serve the iconic North Karnataka dish to lakhs of devotees at the fair. Last year, over 3.5 lakh mirchis were served for which 18 quintals of green chillies and 20 quintals of gram flour were used. This year, it will be prepared using 25 quintals of gram flour, 10 barrels of cooking oil and 20 quintals of green chilli. Four hundred chefs from various villages are participating in the mirchi seva. *—Salar News*

Doubtful if he fasted: Moily on Modi's 11-day ritual

Meanwhile, CM says he worships Gandhi's Ram and not 'BJP's Ram'

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Congress in Karnataka on Tuesday termed the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya a 'political event' and expressed scepticism about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fast for 11 days ahead of 'Prana Pratishtha' ceremony.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he worshipped Mahatma Gandhi's Rama and not 'BJP's Rama' at the newly built Ayodhya temple in Uttar Pradesh. Asked whether he has plans similar to BJP to send three crore pilgrims to Ayodhya, Siddaramaiah wondered whether there was no Rama in the temples in Karnataka. "Don't the idols there belong to Sriramachandra, Sita, Lakshmana and Anjaneya? BJP is out to do politics around Ram temple in Ayodhya. Our objection is to their politics," he said.

Former chief minister Veerappa Moily expressed doubt over the claim that Modi observed fast for 11 days ahead of the consecration. "During a morning walk today (on Tuesday), a doctor, who was accompanying me said no one can survive for 11 days without food. If someone has survived then it is a miracle," he said in Chikkaballapur.

He was curious to know what agenda BJP would have after exhausting the Ram Temple issue. "They (BJP) came to power in various states in the last 25 years saying they will install Ram statue. Now the temple is ready. What next?" Moily wondered.

Ministers DK Shivakumar, KJ George, Krishna Byre Gowda, BK Hariprasad protest against action on Rahul Gandhi's yatra, in Bengaluru on Tuesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Believe in Janata Janardan & Constitution: Kharge

IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge said he does not have 'devotion' as he believed in 'Janata Janardan' (God in people) and Indian constitution. "I will go there (to Ayodhya) if 'Saheb' asks me. I go (on pilgrimage) if I am interested to learn something. Did anyone invite me to go to Varanasi or direct me to go to Rishikesh? I went there (pilgrimage centres) on my own to learn," Kharge said.

Cong protests against attack on Nyay Yatra

Around 200 Congress workers under the leadership of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivkumar protested in Bengaluru on Tuesday against the attack on Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam. "Congress is not scared and will not bow to BJP goons' threat, mantras and religion politics," the KPCC president said at the protest held at Freedom Park.

"The yatra has sent shivers down the spines of BJP leaders and hence, they suspended the yatra for two days," Shivkumar said. "The yatra is not allowed to enter Guwahati which raises the question of whether Constitution and democratic system is alive or dead."

- Congress in Karnataka on Tuesday termed the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya a 'political event' and expressed scepticism about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fast for 11 days ahead of 'Prana Pratishtha' ceremony. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said he worshipped Mahatma Gandhi's Rama and not 'BJP's Rama'

Siddaramaiah said fringe elements in BJP were trying to obstruct the yatra. "Gandhi is doing the march to understand the problems of the nation, its people and the society," the Chief Minister said.

Difficult to heed to everyone's suggestion: CM

Amid discontent brewing within a section of the ruling Congress in Karnataka regarding the political appointments in boards and corporations, Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said it is difficult to heed everyone's suggestion. *—Salar News/PTI*

'AMID RISING FASCISM'

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: PTI*

Now, CM mulls essay contest on Gandhian solutions

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has written a letter to the State Education Minister, Madhu Bangarappa, to organise an essay competition for students on the theme of "Concerns of the 21st century and solutions given by Gandhian thoughts."

In a letter to Bangarappa, Siddaramaiah expressed concerns about contemporary challenges such as forces promoting hatred and violence, centralisation at the expense of decentralisation, and the erosion of rights for various marginalised groups.

He said that the Gandhian ideology offers solutions to these challenges.

The proposed essay competition is intended for students from class 6 and above, excluding those appearing for board exams in classes 10 and 12. Siddaramaiah encouraged the quick organisation of the competition, with rewards for winners and certificates for participants. The initiative aims to foster awareness of Gandhian thoughts among students and promote engagement with the principles that address contemporary challenges. *—Salar News*

City boy missing for 3 days, frantic search on

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A 12-year-old boy from Deens Academy has been reported missing from Whitefield since Sunday.

Parinav had left the Allen tutorial class in Whitefield on Sunday.

On Sunday, his father dropped him off at the tutorial class. His father was supposed to pick him up, but he arrived late and by that time, Parinav had left the class. Parinav is the son of Sukesh and Nivedita. He was wearing a yellow T-shirt and carrying a black Allen bag.

He was seen on CCTV footage at the Inner Circle Park at 12.30 pm and then near Kaveri Hospital between Kundalahalli Gate and Marathahalli Bridge at 2:30 pm on the same day. Later, he was last seen boarding a bus at Marathahalli at 3 pm.

Reportedly, Parinav had no money to pay for the ticket and had gotten down at Marathahalli Market

Parinav *PHOTO: SALAR*

His family has urged anyone with information, no matter how small, to come forward and contact them. The family is using social media platforms extensively to gain leads on the missing child.

"We have been getting a lot of leads from different places but none of them have proper information about where my son could have gone. I'm worried about his safety and my priority is to find him safe," Sukesh, Parinav's father said. If you have seen Parinav, please contact Sukesh at 9845218218, Jayaram at 9986234364 and Dinesh Garg at 9916104328. *—Salar News*

STATE TO WITHDRAW NOTICE URGING PRIEST'S SALARY RETURN

C'MAGALURU, 23 JAN

Karnataka Congress has decided to withdraw the notice demanding the return of the salary paid to Hiremagaluru Kannan, the priest of the Kodandarama temple in Chikkamagaluru, who conducts prayers and chants mantras in Kannada.

Muzarai Department Minister Ramalingareddy announced that he will instruct the Department Commissioner to retract the notice.

The controversy arose when the district administration issued a notice to Kannan, who gained popularity for conducting religious ceremonies in Kannada. Speaking to reporters, minister Ramalingareddy clarified that the notice was a result of an incorrect decision made by the local tehsildar.

Kannan, serving as the head priest of the Kalyana Kodanda Rama temple for the past 44 years, was

receiving a monthly salary of Rs 7,500 from the State government. However, due to a decline in the temple's income, the government decided to reduce the salary to Rs 4,500 and demanded the return of the excess amount paid over the years, amounting to Rs. 4,74,000 for the past 10 years. Additionally, Tehsildar Sumanth issued a notice on 2 December 2023, withholding the salary for December.

Expressing his discontent with the situation, Kannan stated, "It is not right to withhold the salary. There is a shortage of priests in temples. How right is it to ask back the poor priest's salary?" *—Salar News*

BEAT THE HEAT

As days get hotter in Bengaluru, a kite enjoys a dip in a pond at Vidhana Soudha lawns on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Court orders transfer of Jayalalithaa's jewellery to TN

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A special court in Bengaluru has directed the transfer of valuables seized from former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister late J Jayalalithaa to the government of the neighbouring State.

The Tamil Nadu Government will then take necessary action on the disposal of these gold and diamond jewellery which were part of the material evidence in the disproportionate assets case against Jayalalithaa and others.

The trial was held in Karnataka on the direction of the Supreme Court and therefore all material evidence is in the Karnataka treasury now under the custody of the court. Judge HA Mohan presiding over the XXXII Additional City Civil & Sessions court passed the order on Monday.

The court had earlier held that the kins of Jayalalithaa were not entitled for the properties which are confiscated by the State. The Special CBI Court had thus rejected the petition filed by J Deepa and J Deepak, the niece and nephew of

Jayalalithaa, respectively.

Ordering the transfer of the jewels to the Tamil Nadu Government, the Special Court judge said: "Instead of auctioning the jewels, it is better to transfer the same to Tamil Nadu by handing over the same through the Department of Home, State of Tamil Nadu."The Court then issued the direction that the Tamil Nadu Home Department authorise "competent persons preferably in the rank of Secretary along with police to come and collect the jewels."

The Special Court ordered the payment of Rs 5 crore to Karnataka for the expenses of the trial conducted in the State. The payment will be made from a fixed deposit in an account related to Jayalalithaa in the State Bank of India branch in Chennai. *—PTI*

Prohibitory orders in Kalaburagi after quarrel during procession

KALABURAGI, 23 JAN

Prohibitory orders have been clamped in Wadi town in Kalaburagi following a quarrel during a Lord Ram idol procession, police said on Tuesday.

The prohibitory orders under CrPC section 144 which will remain in force until 6 am on 25 January have been issued as a measure to maintain law and order and prevent any untoward incident.

According to the police, a quarrel took place during the procession following an alleged stone-pelting incident on Monday between two groups.

A heated argument between the two groups escalated the situation following which police intervened and used "mild" force to disperse the crowd.

The procession was being carried out to mark the consecration of the idol of Lord Ram at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"It was just a quarrel....a heated argument which escalated. The situation was brought under control soon by our force," a senior police taluk officer said.

Meanwhile, the situation remained tense in many parts of the district on Tuesday after various Dalit organisations held protests, condemning the alleged defacement of a Dr BR Ambedkar statue at Kotnoor on the outskirts of Kalaburagi, police said.

The protesters alleged that some miscreants had also put a garland of footwear on the statue of Ambedkar and demanded that strict action be taken against the culprits.

"We are trying to identify the culprits and action will be taken as per law against those involved in the alleged act", the police officer said. *—Salar News*

2ND TIME IN 6 MONTHS

Beer prices set to rise again in City

Bengaluru, 23 Jan

The State government has planned one more hike in additional excise duty (AED) on beer which will make every 650 ml bottle cost Rs 10 more.

This will be the second hike in liquor prices in six months. In July last year, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had hiked AED on Indian-made Liquor by 20 per cent and on beer from 175 per cent to 185 per cent.

The new prices are expected to be in place from the end of January or the first week in February. KS Shivayya, Joint Director of Excise Department, told the Salar

The new prices are expected to be in place from the end of January or the first week in February *PHOTO: X*

News that the AED on beer is being raised from 185 per cent to 195 per cent.

"Compared to all other liquor such as whiskey, beer is cheaper and to match the price, we are increasing the price of the beer," he added.

A maximum retail price (MRP) store owner in Kalkere said that beer is one of the most sold beverages and the government has taken this step to increase their revenue.

"The government knows that people will still buy beer despite the hike in prices," he said

Beer consumers were disappointed with the government's decision. "Just for the sake of poll gains and to fill their coffers, they are increasing the prices. The government should instead increase the taxes on gaming websites such as RummyCircle, MPL and others. Alcohol consumers should not be taken lightly by the government," a customer who wishes to be unnamed said. *—Salar News*

City to face power cuts till 25 January amid repair works

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The city is likely to face power cuts from Tuesday to Thursday (23 to 25 January) as the Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) and the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) have undertaken several maintenance and repair works.

The power cuts are scheduled between 10 am and 5 pm.The repair activities encompass routine tasks such as renovation, line maintenance, shifting cables from overhead to underground, tree trimming, shifting of poles, and underground cable damage rectification, among others

23 to 25 January:

Doddaballapura Town,

PHOTO: X

Rajagatta, Tippuru, Raghunatha pura, Talagwara, Gandrajapura, Kona gatta, Muddanayakanapalya, Hanabe, SS Ghati, Anthara halli, Kantanakunte, Neralagatta, Hadonahalli and surrounding areas, Obalapura, Doddabele, Kodigehalli, Manne Panchayat, Geddalahalli, Kerekathiganoor, Kasara ghatta, Mahimapura, Lakkena halli, Melekathiganoor, G G Palya, K Agrahara, Arebommana halli, Kodagi Bommana halli, Lakkasandra, Sulkunte, Halkuru, and Thimmasandra.

24 January:

Malebennur, Halivana, Kumbaluru, Boodihal, Nanditavare, Kokkanuru, Govinahal, Kunebelakere, Hindus gatta, Kumarahana halli, Guddada halli, Devarabelakere, Melekatte, Jarikatti, Mudahadadi, Salakatii, K. Bevinahalli, Kadalegundi, Boodhihalli, Chathra, Maralawadi, Godur and surrounding villages, BWSSB STP, Jakkasandra, HSR 5th Sector, Teachers Colony, part of Venkatapura, Greenage Apartment, Koramangala Extension. *—Salar News*

Cong to hold workers' conventions

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Getting battle-ready for the 2024 general elections, the Congress will from Thursday start holding state-level workers' conventions where party Chief Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over meetings of office bearers to energise organisational cadres.The first state-level workers' convention will be held on Thursday in Telangana where the Congress recently formed a government, ousting the K Chadrashekhar Rao government of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi.The party will then hold the state-level workers' convention in Uttarakhand on 28 January, in Odisha on 29 January, in Delhi on 3 February , in Kerala on 4 February , in Himachal Pradesh on 10 February, in Punjab on 11 February, in Tamil Nadu on 13 February and in Jharkhand on 15 February, according to AICC General Secretary, organisation, KC Venugopal.During the conventions, Kharge will preside over meetings of office bearers from the booth to the state level and further "energise our dedicated cadre", Venugopal had said in a post earlier. "Right to the booth level, the Congress is all geared up for a blitzkrieg campaign!" he had said. *—PTI*

'20L houses to be built for poor in J'khand by 2027'

RANCHI, 23 JAN

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Tuesday announced that his government would provide 20 lakh houses to the poor in the state by 2027. Addressing the beneficiaries of 'Abua Awas Yojana' (AAY), a state government-sponsored housing scheme, at Torpa in Khunti district, Soren said that the JMM-led dispensation had demanded eight lakh houses for the poor from the Centre as it had promised to provide accommodations to all the poor. "Initially, the Centre had accepted that Jharkhand has four lakh poor people. But later, it stated that no poor was left for the central housing scheme in the state. So, we decided to provide houses to eight lakh poor people from the state exchequer," the chief minister said. Soren said the state government has launched the 'Abua Awas Yojana' (My House) and sought applications for the scheme during the 'Apki Yojana, Apki Sarkar, Apke Dwar' campaign. *—PTI*

'Doubling farmers' income a propaganda'

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

CPI (M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury on Tuesday called the Union government's promise of doubling the farmers' income a "propaganda" and said that 30 farmers died on an average since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014. "Modi Propaganda: Doubling Farmers' Income... Truth: Since the Narendra Modi government came to power in the Centre in 2014, an average of 30 farmers have died by suicide per day across the country, according to the National Crime Records Bureau," Yechury said in a post on X. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader quoted a report, which said as many as 1,088 farmers committed suicide in eight districts of the Marathwada region in central Maharashtra in 2023 as per a report from the divisional commissioner's office. *—PTI*

Women, youths can rid country of evils: PM

Modi said Netaji understood challenges and warned nation

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

PM participates in 'Parakram Diwas' celebrations observed on birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

- The visitors will get an opportunity to engage in an experience through exhibitions of archives, showcasing rare photographs and documents that chronicle the remarkable journey of Netaji

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said nepotism, dynasticism and corruption in politics impeded India's development after independence and called on people, especially women and the youth, to end these "evils".

Speaking at a function to celebrate the 127th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Modi said the twin evils of nepotism and dynasticism started dominating India's democracy after independence. "Netaji had said that if we want to make India great, the foundation of political democracy and democratic society should be strong. But unfortunately, after independence, his idea came under severe attack," the Prime Minister said.

Modi said Netaji understood very well the challenges facing the country and warned everyone about them. "After independence, evils like nepotism and dynasticism started dominating India's democracy. This has also been a major reason why India could not develop at the pace it should have," Modi said.

He said India's youth and women power can free the country's politics from the evils of nepotism and corruption. "We will have to show courage to end these evils through politics and defeat them," the prime minister said.

The birth anniversary of Bose is celebrated as Parakram Diwas. Modi also launched 'Bharat Parv', which will be held till 31 January, to showcase the country's rich diversity with Republic Day tableaux and cultural exhibits featuring efforts of 26 ministries and departments, highlighting citizen-centric initiatives, vocal for local, diverse tourist attractions, among others.

It will take place at the Ramlila Maidan and the Madhav Das Park in front of the Red Fort. The programme this year will be a multifaceted celebration seamlessly weaving together historical reflections and vibrant cultural expressions.

The visitors will get an opportunity to engage with an immersive experience through exhibitions of archives, showcasing rare photographs and documents that chronicle the remarkable journey of Netaji and the Azad Hind Fauj. *—PTI*

Won't appear before ED: CPI(M) leader

KOCHI, 23 JAN

Senior CPI(M) leader Thomas Isaac on Tuesday said he would not be appearing before the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) case, terming the summons issued to him as "pure harassment". The Foreign Exchange Management Act case is linked to a probe into the alleged violations in the financial dealings of KIIFB during his tenure as the finance minister in the previous LDF government.

Isaac told reporters that he had asked the ED to withdraw the summons issued to him last week. The ED had issued a summons for the 71-year-old politician to depose at the agency office in Kochi on 22 January, but he did not appear before it.

He was earlier asked to appear before it on 12 January but he had not turned up then also. Isaac today said that he was willing to appear before the agency and give an explanation if the ED can point out what law has been violated."But, I am not going to appear before them so that they can question me and find out if any laws were violated. That amounts to self-incrimination and I will not do that," he said.Moreover, the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) has already submitted all accounts and records to the ED, he further said. Therefore, its chairman or vice chairman need not give any accounts or explanation, he added. *—PTI*

CONG SLAMS CENTRE

Mallikarjun Kharge criticised govt over rooftop solar scheme and said not even 10 lakh houses got installation in last 10 years
PHOTO: PTI

Kharge takes a dig at rooftop solar scheme

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his announcement of a scheme to install rooftop solar systems in one crore homes, saying the Prime Minister's "jumlas" soar to the sun.

Modi announced the launch of a scheme, 'Pradhan Mantri Suryoday Yojna', in a post on X on Monday. In a swipe at the prime minister, Kharge said, "Pradhan Mantri ji's JUMLAS soar to the Sun! Yesterday, Modi announced a fresh target of installing rooftop solar for 1 crore houses." The ground reality is that not even 10 lakh houses got rooftop solar installations in the past 10 years of BJP rule, Congress chief claimed.

"Earlier, Modi government made a false promise of installing 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022. The status check of Modi government's grand announcements is the following: – 70 per cent of that target of 40 GW remains unfulfilled. Out of that, only 2.2 GW are installed in homes." "Energy generated from residences was only 1/5th of the installed capacity. After its grand failure, Modi government changed the target to be completed by 2026, without ANY new funding in the scheme," Kharge said.

He further said, "Election Season BJP's Jumla Season!" Modi had said the scheme would not only reduce electricity bills of the poor and the middle class but also make India self-reliant in the energy sector. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CBI AKS DEHADRAI TO APPEAR

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The CBI has asked lawyer Jai Anant Dehadrai to appear before it on Thursday in connection with its probe against former TMC MP Mahua Moitra in a Lokpal-referred corruption complaint against her, officials said Tuesday. Dehadrai, who was once close to Moitra, had levelled serious corruption allegations against the former MP which were strongly refuted by her, they said.

The agency has asked Dehadrai to appear before the AC-3 unit of the agency at 2pm on Thursday to record his version, they said. The CBI has started a probe into the allegations of corruption against Moitra on a reference from the anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal.BJP MP Nishikant Dubey had approached the Lokpal with a complaint against Moitra over allegations that she had taken bribes to raise questions in Parliament.Last month, Moitra was expelled from the Lok Sabha after the House adopted the report of its Ethics Committee that held her guilty of accepting gifts and illegal gratification to further his interest. Moitra has challenged her expulsion in the Supreme Court. *—PTI*

- Dehadrai, who was once close to Moitra, had levelled serious corruption allegations against the former MP

UNGA Prez arrives in Jaipur on 5-day-India visit

JAIPUR, 23 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

United Nations General Assembly President Dennis Francis arrived in Jaipur to a traditional welcome as a part of his 5-day-long India visit on Tuesday.

"khmmaa ghnnii, Rajasthan," the UNGA President wrote on X, upon reaching the north-western state of Rajasthan today. 'Khamma' means 'Greetings' and 'Ghani' means 'a lot', and it is a traditional greeting used in Rajasthan. "Thank you for the very warm welcome!" he wrote alongside a picture. In Jaipur, the UNGA President also met Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari.

"On his arrival at City Palace, Jaipur, today, President of the United Nations General Assembly Dennis Francis, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in India, Shombi Sharp, were heartily welcomed and felicitated," the deputy CM of Rajasthan, Diya Kumari, wrote on X.During the discussions on various international and contemporary issues, the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations praised India's foreign policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said Diya Kumari.He also praised Prime Minister Modi for the G-20 countries summit, which took place under India's chairmanship, Diya Kumari said, adding that Francis also lauded India's help to many countries around the world during the Covid-19 epidemic. *—ANI*

MEET AND GREET

President of Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee YS Sharmila interacts with passengers traveling in an APSRTC bus from Palasa to Ichhapuram
—PTI PHOTO

BLAME GAME

'Bharat has changed': BJP attacks LDF, UDF

T'PURAM, 23 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

- Both the CPI-M-led LDF and Opposition UDF, headed by Congress had slammed the saffron party on Monday for allegedly turning the consecration ceremony into a state-sponsored event

The ruling LDF and opposition UDF in Kerala came under attack from senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar on Tuesday for their criticism of the State's involvement in the Ayodhya Ram Temple consecration ceremony, as he accused them of hypocrisy.

He also asserted "Bharat has changed."

Both the CPI-M-led LDF and Opposition UDF, headed by Congress had slammed the saffron party on Monday for allegedly turning the consecration ceremony into a state-sponsored event.

Javadekar argued that the ceremony was organised by the trust responsible for building the Shri Ram temple with public donations, rather than being a state-sponsored event.

"Bharat has changed. But, You are not. Both LDF and Congress are hypocrites. People will not forgive you but forget you!," Javadekar said in a post on X.

Soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the rituals related to the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya on Monday, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had said India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had often opined that Indian secularism means the separation of religion and state.

Congressman and the Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly VD Satheesan had said conflating faith with politics for electoral gains was to question the very essence of the Constitution and the democracy.

Responding, Javadekar, the BJP's in-charge for Kerala, questioned the sudden focus on Nehruvian secularism and challenged Vijayan and Satheesan to locate the term "secularism" in the Constitution from 1950 to 1975, emphasising on the historical context.

The former Union minister said that the term was added in 1975, embodying the principle of 'Sarv Dharma Sambhav,' meaning respect for all religious faiths.

"There was picture of Prabhu Shri Ram on the first page of the Constitution. Secularism was not debated in constituent assembly. Secularism word was added in 1975. It means 'Sarv Dharma Sambhav' meaning respect for all religious faiths. *—PTI*

Ker gets 5.75L new voters: CEC

T'PURAM/ DEHRADUN, 23 JAN

Kerala has enrolled 5,74,175 new voters into the final voter list for the upcoming general elections and removed 3.75 lakh voters to clean up the final list, State Chief Electoral Officer Sanjay Kaul said on Tuesday. Kaul said that those who could not add their names to the voter list yet could do so before the elections and requested people who have not enrolled themselves to come forward and make use of this opportunity. Talking to the media here, the CEO said that the commission had done commendable work to clean up the voters' list with officials at the booth level visiting each house and collecting details regarding deaths. Based on the information collected, 3,75,867 names were removed from the voters' list, he said. A draft list was published on 27 October, 2023 and the Commission received complaints from the voters before finalising the list, Kaul said. With the addition of 5,74,175 new voters, the total number of voters in Kerala has now become 2,70,99,326, with 1,39,96,729 women voters.

U'khand sees surge of 4.70 L voters since 2019

The number of voters in the state has increased by 4.70 lakh from 2019 and the total number of voters has reached 83 lakh. As per the Election Commission voter list for Uttarakhand as of 1 January, 2024, there are now 83 lakh voters in Uttarakhand, which also includes service voters. Comparatively, after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the number of voters in the state has increased by 4.70 lakh.The state boasts 82.4 lakh general electors and 93,357 service voters, set to cast their votes at 11,729 polling stations across the Himalayan region. According to the new voter list of the state elections, the number of voters in the age group of 18-39 has increased to 40,33,278, out of which there are 1.29 lakh voters in the age group of 18 years. The 11,729 polling stations across Uttarakhand include 3,461 in urban areas and 8,268 in rural pockets. *— ANI*

'Not every Ram bhakt is a BJP supporter'

T'PURAM, 23 JAN

Shashi Tharoor ***PHOTO: PTI***

Congress Working Committee (CWC) member and MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday said that every 'Ram bhakt' was not a BJP supporter and he saw no reason why he or the grand old party should relinquish Lord Ram to the saffron party.

Tharoor, the MP from Thiruvananthapuram, said that there were many, including him, who are devotees of Lord Ram and if in future they go to the temple in Ayodhya it would be to express their devotion and not hurt anyone.

He said that secularism does not mean absence of religion, it means " pluralism" -- everyone can profess the religion of their choice. *—PTI*

FOUNTAINHEAD OF OBC POLITICS

Ex-CM Karpoori Thakur awarded Bharat Ratna

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Two-time Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, considered the fountainhead of OBC politics in Bihar, has been named for the country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna posthumously, a Rashtrapati Bhawan communique said on Tuesday on the eve of his birth centenary.

Thakur, who passed away in 1988, was the first non-Congress socialist leader who became chief minister twice -- first for seven months in December 1970 and later for two years in 1977.

"The President has been pleased to award Bharat Ratna to Shri Karpoori Thakur (posthumously)," the communique said.

Thakur, known affectionately as 'Jan Nayak' (people's leader), is the 49th recipient of the country's highest civilian award. The award was last conferred on late president Pranab Mukherjee in 2019.

Born on January 24, 1924 in Nai samaj (barber society), Thakur is credited in Bihar politics for enforcing total prohibition of alcohol in 1970. The village where he was born in Samistupur district was renamed after him as Karpuri Gram.

Thakur abandoned college education for the Indian freedom struggle and was arrested between 1942 and 1945 for participating in the Quit India Movement.

He was inspired by heavyweights like Ram Manohar Lohia who spearheaded the socialist movement in post-Independent India. He was also close to Jayaprakash Narayan.

Thakur's tenure as chief minister is best remembered for implementation of the recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Commission, whereby quotas for backward classes were introduced in the state. This panel was a forerunner of the Mandal Commission.

A highlight of the Mungeri Lal Commission was a separate sub-category called Most Backward Classes, which provided the template for the 'ati pichhda' plank built by Nitish Kumar years later.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this recognition is a testament to the socialist leader's enduring efforts as a champion for the marginalised and a stalwart of equality. *—PTI*

CBI nabs 7 officials, private firm in ₹60cr bribery case

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The CBI has booked seven railway employees and a private company, Bhartia Infra Projects Ltd., in a Rs 60 crore bribery case related to projects in the North East Frontier Railway zone during 2016-23, officials said Tuesday. The matter came to light after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested Santosh Kumar, senior section engineer of the North East Frontier Railway zone, in a Rs 2 crore bribery case following searches at his premises, they said. *—PTI*

Jawan on leave dies of heart attack while playing cricket

TIKAMGARH, 23 JAN

A 35-year-old Army personnel died of a heart attack while playing cricket during his leave in Tikamgarh district of Madhya Pradesh, an official said on Tuesday. The incident occurred on Sunday in Marguva village. The deceased is Lance Naik Vinod Banskar, died after suffering a heart attack, Dr Yogesh Yadav of district hospital said. Banskar had gone to play cricket in neighbouring village Birau on Sunday afternoon, where he complained of chest pain, his elder brother Jagdish Banskar said.

His family members then took him to Tikamgarh's district hospital, where he died later that night, he said.

Vinod, who was posted in Saharanpur in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, was on a leave and scheduled to return in the first week of February, his brother added. *—PTI*

Exchange of fire between jawans, Maoists in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 23 JAN

Odisha Police's elite Special Operation Group (SOG) on Tuesday busted a Maoist camp following an exchange of fire with the left-wing extremists in Boudh district. The incident took place near Matakupa reserve forest in the Boudh-Kandhamal border when the SOG jawans were undertaking a search operation at Sagada, a senior police officer engaged in anti-Maoist operation said.

The official said the ultras, about 25 to 30 in numbers belonging to the KKBN (Kalahandi-Kandhamal-Boudh-Nayagarh) division of the outlawed CPI(Maoist)), fled away from the spot leaving behind their few camp articles and one sophisticated weapon. It is suspected that a few Maoists have sustained injuries, he said. The officer said that the exchange of fire lasted more than 30 minutes. Meanwhile, combing operations have been intensified with deployment of more SOG jawans following the exchange of fire.*—PTI*

Poachers kill rhino in Kaziranga National Park

GUWAHATI, 23 JAN

An adult female rhino was killed allegedly by poachers in Assam's Kaziranga National Park, an official said on Tuesday. Forest staff of Maklung anti-poaching camp under the park's eastern Agoratoli Range during patrolling duty detected the carcass of an adult female rhino on Monday.

The horn of the dead rhino was found missing, the official said. The post-mortem report is awaited, he said, adding that the forest and police departments have jointly intensified the search operation. Senior forest and police officers are camping in the area, the official added. *—PTI*

HC raps 'busy BMC staff' over pothole ridden roads

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Should the roads in Mumbai be shut down because the civic staff is busy with election duty and survey work for the Maratha reservation, the Bombay High Court questioned on Tuesday. High court was pulling up BMC for not filing an affidavit in a plea regarding pothole-related deaths.

A division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor deprecated the excuses given by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for not filing an affidavit in a matter regarding the rise in the number of pothole-related deaths in the city.

The bench was hearing a petition filed by advocate Ruju Thakker seeking contempt action to be initiated against the civic authorities for failing to implement High Court orders of 2018 directing the repair of potholes along all arterial roads in Mumbai and neighbouring areas. During the last hearing in December, the court had directed the Maharashtra government and all civic bodies to file their affidavits in response to the petition.

On Tuesday, the advocate appearing for the BMC sought more time to file the affidavit.*—PTI*

Security nightmare as 5L devotees visit Ram Mandir

Security personnel struggle to handle crowd after temple opens

AYODHYA, 23 JAN

A massive crowd that swelled by the hour and became unmanageable in the afternoon thronged the main gateway to the Ram temple here as it opened its doors to the public on Tuesday.

Ram Path -- the main thoroughfare -- was choked as devotees flooded the streets of the temple town, which has been gripped by religious fervour over the inauguration of the grand mandir.

The entry of devotees to the temple complex began at 6 am and about 2.5 lakh people are likely to have visited the temple by 2 pm.

It is estimated that about 5 lakh devotees will have visited by the end of the day, another official said.

Waiting in serpentine queues outside the temple were people who had been camping in Ayodhya since before the consecration ceremony, having made long and difficult journeys to reach the temple town.

An idol of the new Ram Lalla was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, a landmark event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Devotees wait in queues to undergo security check to enter the Ram temple, in Ayodhya on Tuesday
The doors of the Ram temple opened to the public a day after the consecration *PHOTO: PTI*

Security personnel struggled to control the crowd as they attempted to enter through the gateway.

For a couple hours in the afternoon, the crowd became so huge that the security personnel scrambled to maintain order.

Reportedly, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is upset with the administration as the police who have been unable to manage the crowd.

The entire section of the Ram Path facing the gateway was blocked as many devotees, some of whom landed with suitcases and backpacks, wanted to have a 'darshan'.

At the main gateway, the commotion in the crowd led to one devotee fainting and having to be taken for medical treatment.

There was a "sudden massive rush" in the morning and the people were continuously streaming in, seeking to visit the temple and have a darshan of Ram Lalla, Dayal said.

"The administration is taking measures to keep the crowd in order, "with proper holding (area), queuing and proper barricading", Ayodhya Divisional Commissioner Gaurav Dayal told PTI.

Uttar Pradesh information director Shishir said more than 8,000 policemen are deployed at the temple and "everything is under control".

Ayodhya police, in a post on X, also refuted rumours that the temple was temporarily closed due to the heavy rush.

Ram Lalla idol to be known as 'Balak Ram'

The new Ram Lalla idol will be known as "Balak Ram" as it depicts the deity as a five-year-old boy in a standing posture.

The reason for naming the idol of Lord Ram as 'Balak Ram' is that he resembles a child, whose age is five years," Arun Dixit, a priest associated with the consecration ceremony told *—PTI*

'IT IS ABSURD'

Elon Musk bats for India's UNSC seat

NEW YORK, 23 JAN

Elon Musk *PHOTO: PTI*

Billionaire tech magnate Elon Musk has said it is "absurd" that India does not have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council despite being the most populous country on Earth. He called for an overhaul of the United Nations organs.

The remarks by Tesla CEO came after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres raised concerns about the absence of any African nation from the list of permanent members of the UNSC.

"How can we accept that Africa still lacks a single Permanent Member in the Security Council?"

"Institutions must reflect today's world, not that of 80 years ago. September's Summit of the Future will be an opportunity to consider global governance reforms and re-build trust," Guterres wrote on X, which is owned by Musk.

Responding to Guterres' post, Michael Eisenberg, a US-born Israeli venture capitalist, raised the issue of India's representation.

Musk also jumped into the debate and said that the current structure of the UN does not adequately represent the world's most populous nations.

"At some point, there needs to be a revision of the UN bodies," he said.

India has been at the forefront of years-long efforts to reform the Security Council, saying it rightly deserves a place as a permanent member at the UN high table, which in its current form does not represent the geo-political realities of the 21st Century.

Currently, the UNSC has five permanent members - China, France, Russia, the UK and the US. Only a permanent member has the power to veto any substantive resolution. *—PTI*

TO UNANIMOUSLY DECIDE

Nagaland to talk Myanmar fencing with NE states

KOHIMA, 23 JAN

Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton (centre) *PHOTO: PTI*

Nagaland government will discuss with other north-eastern states sharing border with Myanmar regarding the Centre's decision to fence the international border with the neighbouring country, said Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton.

Patton said this on the sidelines of a programme held at police headquarters here on Monday.

Asked about the Nagaland government's stand and the state cabinet's meeting with Assam Chief Minister and Convenor of North East Democratic Alliance, Himanta Biswa Sarma in Dimapur recently, he said the Nagaland government will be meeting other northeastern states sharing the Indo-Myanmar border and then will approach the Centre.

"We will be discussing the matter with other north-eastern states and approach the Centre on the Union government's decision to seal the Indo-Myanmar border," he said.

Meanwhile, Nagaland DGP Rupin Sharma said the state government will try to convey its iews and opinions on how to manage the border and free movement regime.

—PTI

HC recalls abortion of 29-week pregnancy order

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday recalled its earlier order allowing a woman, who lost her husband in October last year, to terminate her 29-week foetus.

Justice Subramonium Prasad latest decision came after the Centre filed a plea seeking recall of the 4 January order allowing medical termination of the pregnancy on the grounds that the child has a fair chance of survival and the court should consider protecting the right to life of the unborn infant.

A detailed copy of the order is awaited.

In its application, the central government said in the present case, "termination of pregnancy cannot happen unless the doctors conduct a foeticide, failing which there will be pre term delivery with huge complications".

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), where the woman was medically examined, also claimed that it was advisable that the pregnancy be continued for another two-three weeks for the betterment of the health of the mother and the child.

AIIMS, which urged the court to pass directions on further action in this regard, said as per the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, the provision of termination of pregnancies beyond 24 weeks is to be done for foetuses having significant abnormalities and "foeticide in this case is neither justified nor ethical as the foetus is normal".

On 4 January, High Court had allowed the widow, suffering from depression, to terminate her then 29-week foetus as continuation of pregnancy could affect her mental health. *—PTI*

3 workers run over by train in Mumbai during signalling work

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Railway Police said the incident took place at 8.55 pm *PHOTO: PTI*

Three railway staffers were killed after being run over by a Mumbai-bound local train near Vasai in Palghar when they were fixing a signalling system fault, officials said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred at 8.55 pm on Monday between Vasai Road and Naigaon stations when the local was going towards Churchgate terminus in south Mumbai.

The Western Railway (WR), under whose Mumbai division the accident occurred, said it has ordered a probe into it.

The deceased were identified as chief signalling inspector Vasu Mitra, electrical signalling maintainer Somnath Uttam Lambutre and helper Sachin Wankhede. They had gone to attend signalling point issues that had failed on Monday evening when they were run over by a Churchgate-bound local train on the slow line, it said.

The authorities have paid Rs 55,000 each to the family members. The families of Lambutre and Wankhede will receive Rs 40 lakh each, while Mitra's kin will receive around Rs 1.24 crore in addition to their settlement dues, it said in a statement. *—PTI*

KASHMIR GRAPPLES WITH DRY WINTER

SRINAGAR, 23 JAN

There was no respite from the intense cold wave in Kashmir as the Valley recorded extreme sub-zero temperatures on Monday night, officials said.Srinagar city recorded a minimum temperature of minus 5.0 degrees Celsius on Monday, marginally up from the previous night's minus 5.3 degrees, the officials said on Tuesday.

Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, which serves as one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 6.2 degrees Celsius.

A dry and largely snowless winter in Kashmir has resulted in freezing nights and warmer days as maximum temperatures in Srinagar have been eight degrees above normal. *—PTI*

Kolkata man climbs down bridge after cops promise job, biryani

KOLKATA, 23 JAN

Kolkata Police had to make a promise of employment and lure a man with a biryani packet in order to convince him to come down from a bridge he had climbed with the intention of committing suicide.

The incident happened on Monday causing disruption to traffic through one of the busiest streets of the city for nearly half-an-hour, the police officer from Karaya station said.

The man, later identified as a 40-year-old resident of the locality, has been under severe emotional stress following separation from his wife and simultaneous financial constraints due to losses in his business, he said. "Around 2.30pm, he was taking his elder daughter to Science City on his two-wheeler. He stopped near the bridge and told her that his mobile phone had fallen somewhere on the road and he was trying to spot it. Then he climbed up the bridge and then threatened to jump off," he said. Onlookers said a team from the police station along with personnel of Kolkata Police Disaster Management Group (DMG) and the fire department reached the spot and started talking with him, he added. "We spoke to his daughter and accordingly planned the conversation to convince and bring him down. And finally, after we made the offers, he agreed to come down," the policeman said. Police feared if the man had slipped, he could have either hit poles or would have fallen on railway tracks beneath. *—PTI*

Soumya's killers challenge life sentence, HC seeks cops' reply

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Soumya Vishwanathan *PHOTO: PTI*

Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the city police to respond to appeals filed by the four convicts handed down life imprisonment in the Soumya Vishwanathan murder case challenging their conviction and sentence.

A bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Manoj Jain issued notice to the police on the appeals by Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Singh Malik and Ajay Kumar.

Vishwanathan, who worked with a leading English news channel, was shot dead in the early hours of 30 September, 2008 on Nelson Mandela Marg in south Delhi while she was returning home from work in her car.

High Court also asked the authorities to file a reply to the interim application moved by the convicts for suspension of their sentence.

The bench, which asked the jail authorities to submit the nominal roll on their conduct in prison, listed the interim application for hearing on 12 February. A special court had on 26 November, 2023 awarded two life terms to Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Malik and Ajay Kumar. The court had made it clear that the sentences will run "consecutively".

The fifth convict, Ajay Sethi, was handed down three years of simple imprisonment.

It, however, set off the three-year sentence against the time Sethi had already served, noting he remained in custody for more than 14 years and underwent incarceration during the trial for offences under the IPC and MCOCA for conspiring to abet, aid, or knowingly facilitate organised crime and receiving proceeds of organised crime.

During the brief hearing in the high court on Tuesday, advocate Dimple, representing Kapoor, submitted he has been in custody for the last 14 years and nine months, and urged the court to suspend his sentence during the pendency of the appeal. *—PTI*

MCD bans teachers from striking

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The MCD's Education Department in the Rohini zone has issued a directive to its teachers and staff putting a ban on engaging in any strikes, demonstrations or criticism on social media against it.

Strict action would be taken against any staff indulging in such activities, it said.

"If any employee is found indulging/participating in any form of strike/mass casual leave/boycott of work etc or adversely criticising the department on social media and press, strict action may be initiated against the defaulter," the notice dated 22 January read. The notice said such activities are a violation of CCS, Conduct Rules, 1964.

Calls and texts to Rishi Pal Rana, deputy director, education, Rohini Zone, MCD did not elicit any response. In the notice addressed to head of schools, the department directed its employees to get disassociated from "unrecognised associations", saying they were maligning the image of the department by speaking to the press, and on social media. Teachers in the Rohini Zone have also been asked not to participate in any boycott of work, mass casual leave or any activities organised by these associations. *—PTI*

AFTER DEATH OF AN ADULT

Namibian cheetah gives birth to 3 cubs

BHOPAL/NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

This is the second litter of Jwala, after 10 months *PHOTO: ANI*

A Namibian cheetah has given birth to three cubs at the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh, weeks after three cubs were born to another feline.

According to officials, these cubs were born to Jwala on 20 January.

This is the second litter of Jwala, after a gap of 10 months.

Jwala (Namibian name Siyaya) had also given birth to four cubs in March last year. However, only one of them survived.

So, the number of cubs in the KNP has increased to seven now, with six of them born in this month alone.

This has been a mixed month for India's cheetah project as it saw the birth of six cubs and the death of a Namibian cheetah, Shaurya, at the KNP on 16 January.

Since March 2023, seven adult cheetahs, including Shaurya, have died in the park due to various reasons. This has taken the total fatality count of felines, including three cubs, to 10 at the KNP.

The total number of cheetahs at the KNP currently stands at 20 (six males, seven females and seven cubs).

Jwala and Aasha are among the cheetahs translocated to India from Namibia under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Project Cheetah, aimed at re-introducing the only large carnivore species that went extinct in independent India.

The much-vaunted cheetah conservation project, however, has drawn sharp criticism over the deaths of seven of the 20 adults imported from Namibia and South Africa.

One of the biggest challenges faced in the first year of managing the cheetahs in India was the unexpected development of winter coats by some of the animals during the Indian summer and monsoon, in anticipation of the African winter (June to September). *—PTI*

UNDER WATER

A car sits along a flooded road during a rain storm Monday, in San Diego. Heavy rainfall around the US on Monday prompted first responders in Texas to conduct water rescues and officials in California to issue evacuation warnings over potential mud slides in parts of Los Angeles County
PHOTO: PTI

Bose: Remembering India's 'lost' leader

Subhas Chandra Bose was twice-elected president of the Indian National Congress, founder and president of the All India Forward Bloc, and founder of the Provisional Government of Free India
PHOTO: PTI

India's leaders need to tiptoe warily when honouring the country's pantheon of political heroes.

It's difficult to talk up one without being seen as talking down another - and when they are championed by different political, religious, regional and caste groups, you can see the problem.

Almost 70 years after independence, the fate of the nationalist firebrands of that era continues to excite powerful emotions.

That is true above all for the man often regarded as India's 'lost' leader, the charismatic Subhas Chandra Bose.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will need to bear that in mind this week when he hosts 50 or so relatives of Bose, who is also known by the title 'Netaji' or 'respected leader'.

He was a radical nationalist from an elite Bengali family who allied in the 1940s with Nazi Germany and imperial Japan to seek to evict Britain from India.

After Second World War adventures that included a dramatic escape from house arrest in India, a meeting with Hitler, an epic journey in a German submarine to Japanese-held Sumatra and the raising of an army of Indians in south-east Asia, Bose died in a plane crash in Taiwan on 18 August 1945. Or did he?

India's leaders need to tiptoe warily when honouring the country's pantheon of political heroes.

Official files released

The release last month of long-closed official files in Kolkata has rekindled speculation that Netaji survived the war and was either held prisoner by the Russians, lived on as a hermit-like holy man, or simply lived out his life in the style of the legendary King Arthur - standing by should his country need him as its saviour.

Historians, including those within his immediate family, are broadly convinced that Bose did indeed lose his life in that 1945 air accident.

But some family members, and many who see themselves as inheritors of his political legacy, believe fervently that Netaji did not die in Taiwan - and that somewhere in hidden archives lies buried the true story of their leader's fate.

Bose is a national figure, but Bengalis take particular pride in him and a party with seats in the West Bengal state assembly still fiercely champions his reputation.

Mamata Banerjee, the state's chief minister, may have imagined that declassifying files about him would be a good political move.

She went further, though, and suggested that the documents give credence to the notion that Bose survived the air crash.

"From whatever I have seen, it seems he was alive after 1945."

Not so, insists the distinguished historian Sugata Bose - Netaji's grand-nephew and his biographer.

He says the files "contain nothing substantially new" - though they demonstrate the intense surveillance of the Bose family and dutifully record all the speculation and stray rumour about Bose's fate.

Subhas Chandra Bose:

Twice-elected president of the Indian National Congress, founder and president of the All India Forward Bloc, and founder of the Provisional Government of Free India.

Advocated armed struggle for Indian independence from the British Empire.Placed under house arrest by the British before escaping from India in 1940, arriving in Germany in 1941.Attempted to rid India of British rule during World War Two by enlisting the help of Nazi Germany and Japan.

Played a role in establishing a Free India Legion, made up of Indians captured by Rommel's Afrika Korps, formed to aid a possible future German land invasion of India.Moved to Japanese-held Sumatra in 1943, where he revamped the Indian National Army, which fought alongside the Japanese army in its unsuccessful attempt to invade India.Believed to have died in 1945 when his plane crashed in Taiwan.There have been mutterings within the Bose clan that the prime minister is giving a platform to distant relatives who are "non-believers" - who refuse to accept the well-documented account of Bose's death and espouse what others within the family have described to me as "wild stories that are just so tiresome".

—BBC News

LETTERS

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SALAR ساڈا

Medical AI 'dangerous' for poorer nations, warns WHO

AI could be "dangerous" for people in lower-income countries
PHOTO: PIXABAY

The introduction of health-care technologies based on artificial intelligence (AI) could be "dangerous" for people in lower-income countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

The organisation, which today issued a report describing new guidelines on large multi-modal models (LMMs), says it is essential that uses of the developing technology are not shaped only by technology companies and those in wealthy countries. If models aren't trained on data from people in under-resourced places, those populations might be poorly served by the algorithms, the agency says.

"The very last thing that we want to see happen as part of this leap forward with technology is the propagation or amplification of inequities and biases in the social fabric of countries around the world," Alain Labrique, the WHO's director for digital health and innovation, said at a media briefing today.

Overtaken by events

The WHO issued its first guidelines on AI in health care in 2021. But the organization was prompted to update them less than three years later by the rise in the power and availability of LMMs. Also called generative AI, these models, including the one that powers the popular ChatGPT chatbot, process and produce text, videos and images.

LMMs have been "adopted faster than any consumer application in history", the WHO says. Health care is a popular target. Models can produce clinical notes, fill in forms and help doctors to diagnose and treat patients. Several companies and health-care providers are developing specific AI tools.

The WHO says its guidelines, issued as advice to member states, are intended to ensure that the explosive growth of LMMs promotes and protects public health, rather than undermining it. In the worst-case scenario, the organization warns of a global "race to the bottom", in which companies seek to be the first to release applications, even if they don't work and are unsafe. It even raises the prospect of "model collapse", a disinformation cycle in which LMMs trained on inaccurate or false information pollute public sources of information, such as the Internet.

"Generative AI technologies have the potential to improve health care, but only if those who develop, regulate and use these technologies identify and fully account for the associated risks," said Jeremy Farrar, the WHO's chief scientist.

Operation of these powerful tools must not be left to tech companies alone, the agency warns. "Governments from all countries must cooperatively lead efforts to effectively regulate the development and use of AI technologies," said Labrique. And civil-society groups and people receiving health care must contribute to all stages of LMM development and deployment, including their oversight and regulation.

Crowding out academia

In its report, the WHO warns of the potential for "industrial capture" of LMM development, given the high cost of training, deploying and maintaining these programs. There is already compelling evidence that the largest companies are crowding out both universities and governments in AI research, the report says, with "unprecedented" numbers of doctoral students and faculty leaving academia for industry.The guidelines recommend that independent third parties perform and publish mandatory post-release audits of LMMs that are deployed on a large scale. Such audits should assess how well a tool protects both data and human rights, the WHO adds. It also suggests that software developers and programmers who work on LMMs that could be used in health care or scientific research should receive the same kinds of ethics training as medics. And it says governments could require developers to register early algorithms, to encourage the publication of negative results and prevent publication bias and hype.

—Courtesy, the Nature

Governments could require developers to register early algorithms, to encourage the publication of negative results and prevent publication bias and hype
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Amid India-Maldives spat, Lakshadweep citizens demand jobs first

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Bangaram, in Lakshadweep
PHOTO: PTI

Sitting on a cane chair at the edge of the Indian Ocean, then strolling on the pristine white sand of a Lakshadweep beach, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi advertised in late December for the federally governed archipelago.

"Those who want to visit different beaches around the world, and are enamoured by them — I request them to first come to Lakshadweep and take a look," Modi said, in a video widely shared on social media platforms.

That message has triggered a diplomatic crisis between India and the Maldives, South Asia's smallest nation and a tourist paradise where some ministers hit back in coarse language on social media at what they perceived as an Indian attempt to woo tourists away from their resorts. In turn, Indian social media influencers — including Bollywood stars and ex-cricketers — went into overdrive, pitching Lakshadweep islands as tourist destinations, and others criticising the Maldives.

The Maldives suspended the ministers who had badmouthed India and Modi in the wake of the advertisement. But when President Mohammed Muizzu, who was visiting Beijing — New Delhi's archrival — at the time, returned to the Maldives, he had a warning for his giant neighbour on his lips. "We may be small, but that doesn't give you the licence to bully us," he said on Saturday.

But back in Lakshadweep, many people do not want their islands caught up in a tourism tussle between India and the Maldives. They have more fundamental questions for their government — and for Modi.

Lakshadweep has 36 islands, 10 of which are inhabited. Once served by seven ships, its population of 64,000 people must now make do with just two ships that ferry them between their islands and the mainland once every week or 10 days.

"The Prime Minister wants to invite everyone to Lakshadweep, but if the people of Lakshadweep want to go outside, we have no ship tickets to the mainland," said Ayisha Sultana, an activist and film director.

"Improve that first, then talk about big plans."

It is just one of the many concerns shaping the popular response in Lakshadweep to the prospect of tourists from India and beyond flooding their islands.

Limited representation

Unlike states and many federally governed territories, Lakshadweep has no democratically elected government. It elects a legislator to parliament and is governed by an administrator appointed by the federal government.

The current Lakshadweep administrator, Praful K Patel, has been accused by many locals of riding roughshod over their concerns. Under him, the local administration demolished fishermen's sheds in capital Kavaratti as part of a process to beautify beaches. The fishermen's union contested this move in the High Court of Kerala, the nearest mainland state, and the case remains unresolved.

"We are not against the development of tourism, especially in the uninhabited islands. But if they are considering tourism in inhabited islands like Kavaratti, will the authorities be ready to share the beaches with us," asked Nijamudheen, the president of the Lakshadweep Fisheries Association, who goes by a single name. "Tourism must be restricted to small areas in the inhabited islands and uninhabited islands; otherwise, it will be a potential threat to the fishermen."

Most Lakshadweep youth go to college on the mainland, predominantly in Kerala. But travelling back and forth is a challenge.

"Even we students can't reach the islands on time," said Sayed Mohammed Anees, a 28-year-old from Androth Island who is contemplating enrolling for a PhD after completing his master's degree in education from Kerala. "Getting tickets and all is a Himalayan task in all the vocations. How will they turn this place into the Maldives? That is not an easy task."

'Easy to implement their agendas'

Any contest over tourists is also complicated for Lakshadweep by the fact that one of its islands, Minicoy, is geographically and culturally very close to the Maldives.

They speak the same language — the ancestors of Minicoy locals came from the Maldives, which is closer than any other Lakshadweep island.

Still, tourism could help bring jobs and much-needed cash. At the moment, though, Lakshadweep is in no position to compete.

Traditionally, the economy of Lakshadweep relied on copra and dry tuna exports to other parts of the country. Post-Independence, modern education was introduced by teachers from nearby Kerala. Literacy rates have significantly increased, now ranking second in the country.

Yet the pinnacle of ambition for many young women and men is to secure a government job.

Currently, there are approximately 5,000 permanent government employees in Lakshadweep. Despite its geography, tourism does not figure among its top revenue sources.

Tourism in Lakshadweep is managed by a society named SPORTS, owned by the Lakshadweep administration. Currently, tourism operations are active in inhabited islands such as Agatti, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kadmat, Minicoy, and the uninhabited island of Bangaram. Agatti has the only airport, where a daily flight carrying up to 68 passengers lands and takes off.

'How can he clean beaches by firing cleaners?'

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, SPORTS fired more than 800 contractual workers. Currently, less than 100 people are employed in SPORTS.The Lakshadweep administration has terminated more than 3,000 employees since December 2020, when Patel took office. Ajmeer Khan, a former employee under the Lakshadweep administration, said he had no hope that he and his fired colleagues would be hired again. But the retrenchments have also affected Lakshadweep's tourism potential.Under Patel's rule, more than 450 sanitation workers who collected waste from inhabited parts of the islands and brought it to incinerators were let go. Incinerators that were installed on all islands no longer work. "Even though the administrator is saying that he is cleaning the islands, it is not true," said Abdul Salam from Kiltan island, who fought for the payment of pending wages to the fired sanitation workers. "How can he clean the islands by disengaging the people who are actually cleaning them?"

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

PHOTO: AP

Strong tremor hits part of China, 47 homes collapse

BEIJING, 23 JAN

A magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck a sparsely populated part of China's western Xinjiang region early on Tuesday, injuring six people and damaging or collapsing more than 120 homes in freezing cold weather, authorities said. The quake was the latest in a series of seismic events and natural disasters to hit the vast country's western regions. The quake rocked Uchturpan county in Aksu prefecture shortly after 2 a.m., the China Earthquake Networks Centre said. Around 200 rescuers were dispatched to the epicentre. The county is called Wushi in the Mandarin language spoken by most Chinese. Of the six people hurt, two had serious injuries and four were minor. In addition, 47 houses collapsed, 78 houses were damaged and some agricultural structures collapsed, the government of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region posted on its official Weibo social media account. The quake downed power lines but electricity was quickly restored, Aksu authorities reported. —*AP*

Japana's Princess Aiko gets job with Red Cross

SEOUL, 23 JAN

Princess Aiko, the only child of Japan's Emperor Naruhito, will begin work at the Japanese Red Cross Society in April after graduating from university. While details of her new role are unclear, she will continue official duties with the imperial family. The 22-year-old princess is not in line of succession as Japanese law allows only men to ascend to the throne. Japan has the oldest continuing hereditary monarchy in the world. In a statement, Princess Aiko said that she has "always had an interest" in the Red Cross, while her new employer added that it wants "to thoroughly make preparations so that the princess can work at ease". —*BBC News*

Ex-Aus PM Scott Morrison to quit politics

SYDNEY, 23 JAN

Australia's former prime minister Scott Morrison has announced he will quit parliament to join the private sector. Morrison, a conservative who was first elected in 2007, was the country's leader from 2018 to 2022. He oversaw Australia's pandemic response, the Aukus defence pact, and was embroiled in a historic scandal for secretly appointing himself to several ministerial positions while prime minister. "The time has come for me to return to private life," he said on Tuesday. In a statement Morrison, 55, said he would now take on "strategic advisory roles" across Asia to focus on security matters in the Indo-Pacific. A devout Christian, he said he was "looking forward to being more active" in his church and spending time with his family. —*BBC News*

SL votes to debate controversial online safety bill

COLOMBO, 23 JAN

Sri Lanka's Parliament on Tuesday voted to go ahead with a scheduled debate on a controversial Online Safety Bill that critics say will stifle freedom of speech. Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena had called for a vote to decide if the two-day debate should proceed. Out of 225 legislators, 83 voted in favour of holding the debate while 50 voted against it. Opposition parties had sought more time for consultations on the bill. Opposition MPs and other critics have warned that the Online Safety Bill could be a threat to freedom of speech. Tiran Alles, the public security minister, while opening the debate said the Supreme Court had suggested amendments to the bill and they would be incorporated after the bill is approved in parliament on Wednesday. —*PTI*

Canada announces 2-year cap on int'l student visas

The cap is likely to impact 3,64,000 students including Indians

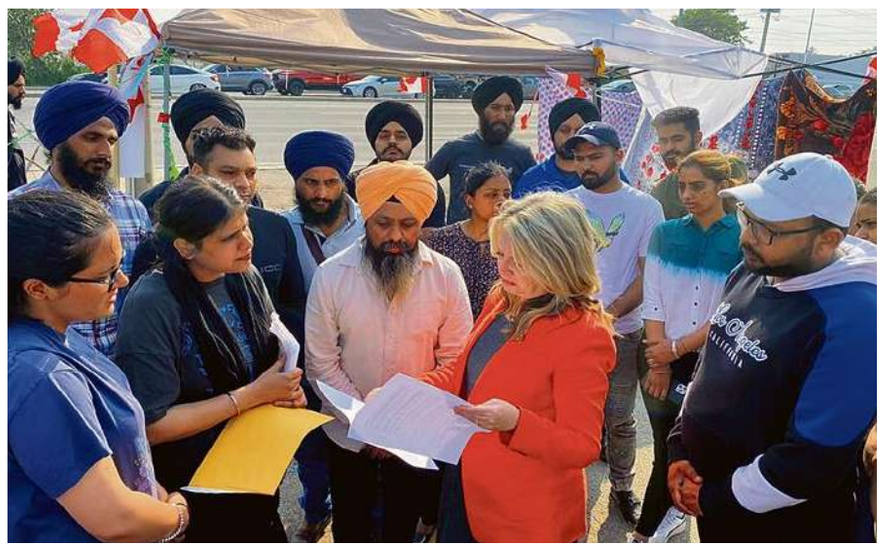
OTTAWA, 23 JAN

Canada has announced that it is imposing an immediate two-year cap on new international student visas to tackle a housing crisis and target institutional "bad actors", a move that is likely to impact Indians planning to study in the country.

Immigration Minister Marc Miller said as part of the cap there will be a 35 per cent reduction in new study visas in 2024. The cap is expected to result in 3,64,000 new approved permits in 2024. Nearly 5,60,000 such visas were issued last year.

The cap will be in place for two years; the number of permits to be issued in 2025 will be reassessed at the end of this year, he said. "To maintain a sustainable level of temporary residence in Canada, as well to ensure that there is no further growth in the number of international students in Canada for 2024, we are setting a national application intake cap for two years from 2024," Global News quoted Miller as saying.

The move comes amid pressure on the federal government from provinces on the increasing numbers of non-permanent residents entering Canada while the country struggles with a housing crisis, CBC News said. Miller earlier this month said that a cap on international students would not be a "one-size-fits-all solution" to housing shortages across Canada.



More than 8,00,000 international students were issued temporary study visas in 2022 *PHOTO: PTI*

More than 8,00,000 international students were issued temporary study visas in 2022. Miller said last fall that 2023's numbers were on track to be more than triple the number accepted 10 years ago. The move is expected to impact students from India who see Canada as a preferred destination for higher studies.

India was the first among the top ten origin countries of study permit holders in 2022 in Canada, with a total of 319,000 students. Miller said that by imposing the cap, the federal government is taking action against some small private colleges. The move will help the government to target institutional "bad actors", he said.

"It's unacceptable that some private institutions have taken advantage of international students by operating under-resourced campuses, lacking supports for students and charging high tuition fees all the while significantly increasing their intake of international students," Miller said.

In some provinces, Miller said, the total reduction in permits will be approximately 50 per cent. —*PTI*

- Miller earlier this month said that a cap on international students would not be a "one-size-fits-all solution" to housing shortages across Canada

> **To maintain a sustainable level of temporary residence, as well to ensure that there is no further growth in the number of international students for 2024, we are setting a national application intake cap for two years**
>
> -Global News quoted Miller

Israel says 21 soldiers killed in Gaza

JERUSALEM, 23 JAN

Twenty-one soldiers were killed in the Gaza Strip in the deadliest attack on Israel's forces since the October 7 Hamas raid that triggered the war, the military said on Tuesday, a major setback that could add to mounting calls for a cease-fire.

Hours later, the military announced that ground forces had encircled the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest, where dozens of Palestinians have been killed and wounded in heavy fighting in recent days.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mourned the soldiers but vowed to press ahead with the offensive until "absolute victory" over Hamas. He has also promised to return over 100 hostages held captive in Gaza. But Israelis are increasingly divided on the question of whether it's possible to do either, and large numbers of Israeli casualties have pressured Israel's government to halt past military operations.

A collage of soldiers killed in the central Gaza Strip *PHOTO: TIMES OF ISRAEL*

A senior Egyptian official meanwhile said Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which the hostages would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries.

The official, who was not authorised to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Hamas rejected the proposal and is insisting that no more hostages will be released until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. Israel's government declined to comment on the talks. The official said Egypt and Qatar, which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas, were developing a multistage proposal to try and bridge the gaps.

Families of the hostages have called for Israel to reach a deal with Hamas, saying time is running out to bring the hostages home alive. Israeli reservists were preparing explosives to demolish two buildings in central Gaza when a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank nearby. The blast triggered the explosives, causing both two-story buildings to collapse on the soldiers inside. —*AP*

Imran questions transparency of Pskistan polls

ISLAMABAD, 23 JAN

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan has questioned the transparency of the elections set to be conducted on 8 February and added that the 'preferential treatment' meted out to a single political party had turned these polls into the 'mother of all selections', Pakistan-based Dawn reported. He asked Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf members to engage in electioneering. Imran Khan made these remarks during his routine interaction with reporters after the hearing of the cypher case being held at Adiala Jail. His interaction was abruptly ended after the jail superintendent, Asad Warraich, asked Khan not to speak to reporters in the makeshift courtroom. —*ANI*

IN BRITAIN

Rwanda migration bill suffers a blow in Parl

LONDON, 23 JAN

The upper house of Britain's Parliament has urged the Conservative government not to ratify a migration treaty with Rwanda. It's a largely symbolic move, but signals more opposition to come for the stalled and contentious plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to the African nation.

The House of Lords voted by 214 to 171 on Monday evening to delay the treaty that paves the way for the deportation plan. The treaty and an accompanying bill are the pillars of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak 's bid to overcome a block on the deportations by the UK Supreme Court. Members of the Lords, who are appointed rather than elected, backed a motion saying Parliament should not ratify the pact until ministers can show Rwanda is safe. John Kerr, a former diplomat who sits in the Lords, said the Rwanda plan was "incompatible with our responsibilities" under international human rights law. "The considerations of international law and national reputation... convince me that it wouldn't be right to ratify this treaty at any time," he said.

The vote has little practical impact, because the House of Lords can't block an international treaty, and the government says it will not delay. However, ignoring the demand could later be used against the government in a legal challenge.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons approved the bill last week, but only after 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher. —*PTI*

Russian strikes kill 6 Ukrainians

KYIV, 23 JAN

A complex Russian missile attack targeted Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Kharkiv on Tuesday morning, killing at least six people, wounding dozens and damaging residential buildings, officials said.

In the capital of Kyiv, at least one person was killed, according to city administration chief Roman Popko. Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said 18 people were injured, including a 13-year-old boy. Residential infrastructure was damaged in at least four districts.

In Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, five people were killed and 38 were wounded, mayor Ihor Terekhov said. An entire section of a multi-story residential building was destroyed, trapping an unknown number of people there, Terekhov said. Recent Russian attacks have tried to find gaps in Ukraine's defences by using large numbers of missiles and drones in an apparent effort to saturate air defence systems.

The massive barrages - more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between 29 December and 2 January, according to officials in Kyiv - are also using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles. The missile attack came a day after Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk visited Ukraine, vowing to keep supporting it against Russia's nearly 2-year-old invasion and announcing a new military aid package that includes a loan to buy larger weapons and a commitment to find ways to manufacture them together.

Meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv, Tusk said they had reached "an understanding" to resolve through talks any differences between their countries over grain shipments and trucking. —*AP*

Death toll in landslide in China rises to 31

BEIJING/KUNMING, 23 JAN

The death toll from a landslide that struck southwest China's mountainous Yunnan province has climbed to 31, with 24 people still missing, local authorities said on Tuesday.

The landslide occurred in Liangshui Village in the city of Zhaotong at about 6 a.m. on Monday, trapping a total of 47 people.

The Ministry of Emergency Management upgraded the emergency response level to the second-highest level from the Level-III emergency response for disaster relief activated by the Provincial Commission for Disaster Reduction immediately after the landslide.

The ministry dispatched teams to the disaster-hit area to guide the rescue and relief work, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency. —*PTI*

RED SEA SHIPPING ATTACKS

The US and UK said they had carried out eight strikes, with support from many countries *PHOTO: UK MINISTRY OF DEFENCE*

US, UK launch fresh strikes on Houthi targets

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

The United States and the United Kingdom have carried out a new round of strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen as the Iran-aligned armed group continues to target commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

The Houthis, who control much of Yemen, have attacked dozens of ships in the major waterway since November, disrupting international maritime trade and raising concern about the impact on the global economy. On Monday, the US and UK said they had carried out eight strikes, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, targeting a Houthi underground storage site as well as missile and surveillance capabilities.

"These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of innocent mariners," the joint statement said.

The Houthis have said the attacks are in response to Israel's war in Gaza and to show their support for the Palestinians.

The armed group has carried out more than 30 attacks on international shipping since mid-November, according to the UK's Ministry of Defence.

It said the attacks on Houthi sites were to hold the group "accountable for their illegal and unjustifiable attacks on mariners and commercial shipping" as well as to "de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea".

Monday's strikes came after the Houthis claimed to have conducted a successful attack on the US military cargo ship Ocean Jazz in the Gulf of Aden.

US Naval Forces Central Command denied the claims as "patently false" and said it had "maintained constant communications with M/V Ocean Jazz throughout its safe transit". The Houthis did not say when or precisely where the attack took place, or if any damage was caused.

"The Yemeni Armed Forces affirm that retaliation against American and British attacks is inevitable, and any new aggression will not go unpunished," the group said in a statement.

—*Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

Pentagon has no more money for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

For the first time since Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin established the international group to support Ukraine in April 2022, the United States will host the monthly gathering of about 50 countries out of money, unable to send the ammunition and missiles that Ukraine needs to fend off Russia While waiting for Congress to pass a budget and potentially approve more money for Ukraine's fight, the US will be looking to allies to keep bridging the gap Tuesday's meeting will focus on longer-term needs, deputy Pentagon press secretary Sabrina Singh told reporters on Monday. "Even though we aren't able to provide our security assistance right now, our partners are continuing to do that," Singh said. The meeting will be virtual because Austin is still recuperating at home from complications of treatment for prostate cancer. —*AP*

NATO signs ammunition contract

BRUSSELS, 23 JAN

NATO signed on Tuesday a USD 1.2-billion contract to make tens of thousands of artillery rounds to replenish the dwindling stocks of its member countries as they supply ammunition to Ukraine to help it defeat Russia's invasion. The contract will allow for the purchase of 220,000 rounds of 155-millimetre ammunition, the most widely sought after artillery shell, according to NATO's support and procurement agency. It will allow allies to backfill their arsenals and to provide Ukraine with more ammunition. "This is important to defend our own territory, to build up our own stocks, but also to continue to support Ukraine," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters. "We cannot allow President Putin to win in Ukraine," he added. "That would be a tragedy for the Ukrainians and dangerous for all of us." —*AP*

OSCARS NOMINATIONS 2024

Oppenheimer and Barbie set to dominate

NEW YORK, 23 JAN

Nominations for the 2024 Oscars will be announced later, after a huge year for cinema which saw Barbie and Oppenheimer dominate the box office.

Poor Things, The Holdovers and Killers of the Flower Moon are also expected to feature heavily when the nominations are announced from 13:30 GMT. Cillian Murphy, Emma Stone, Robert Downey Jr and Da'Vine Joy Randolph are all likely to score acting nominations. Jimmy Kimmel will host this year's ceremony on 10 March.

Which films are competing for best picture?

After a rule change a few years ago intended to widen the field, the best picture category now has a guaranteed 10 slots available.

There is general consensus that 'Oppenheimer', 'Barbie', 'Poor Things', 'Killers of the Flower Moon' and 'The Holdovers' will all score nominations. 'Anatomy of a Fall', 'Maestro', 'The Zone of Interest', 'Past Lives' and 'American Fiction' are also seen as hot favourites and very likely to compete for the Academy's most prestigious prize.

But there are plenty of other contenders which could easily spring nominations in the top category, such as 'The Color Purple', 'Society of the Snow', 'All of Us Strangers' and 'May December'.

Who's in the acting race?

After a slightly weaker field in 2023, this year's best actor category is extremely crowded and competitive.

'The frontrunner' is Paul Giamatti for 'The Holdovers'. Cillian Murphy is also in the race for his portrayal of theoretical physicist J Robert 'Oppenheimer', while Bradley Cooper could be recognised for his performance as composer Leonard Bernstein in 'Maestro'. The best actress category is just as busy. Lily Gladstone will likely be recognised for her role in 'Killers of the Flower Moon'.

Cillian Murphy, Emma Stone, Robert Downey Jr and Da'Vine Joy Randolph are all likely to score acting nominations *PHOTO: X*

What about the supporting categories?

The Holdovers star Da'Vine Joy Randolph is the safest bet of all the acting categories - she has dominated at all the precursor ceremonies and is very likely to win best supporting actress at the Oscars.

She could be joined in the category by 'The Color Purple' star Danielle Brooks, Oppenheimer's Emily Blunt, Nyad's Jodie Foster and Ferrari's Penélope Cruz. Other possible nominees include Julianne Moore of May December, Saltburn's Rosamund Pike and Barbie's America Ferrera.

What about the directors?

Several Oscars will almost certainly show up in this category - such as Martin Scorsese for 'Killers of the Flower Moon', and Christopher Nolan for 'Oppenheimer'. There could also be recognition for Greta Gerwig for 'Barbie', Jonathan Glazer for 'The Zone of Interest' and Yorgos Lanthimos for 'Poor Things'. Otherwise, spots could go to Justine Triet for 'Anatomy of a Fall', Alexander Payne for 'The Holdovers', Bradley Cooper for 'Maestro' and potentially even Celine Song for her accomplished directorial debut Past Lives.

Why is best original song so crowded?

In a word, Barbie. The film's soundtrack was almost as ubiquitous last summer as the movie itself. Three different songs from the film are in contention for the musical prize this year.

—*BBC News*

Rupee falls 9 paise to close at 83.16 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to 83.16 (provisional) against the US dollar, as elevated crude oil prices and weak domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.Forex traders said foreign fund outflows also put pressure on the rupee. However, a weak US Dollar overseas cushioned the downside.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.11 and finally settled at 83.16 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 9 paise from its previous close. During the day, it witnessed an intraday high of 83.06 and a low of 83.17 against the American currency.On Friday, the rupee settled at 83.07 against the US dollar."We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak domestic markets and selling pressure from foreign investors.—*PTI*

Gold rises ₹100; silver jumps ₹200

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Gold prices increased Rs 100 to Rs 63,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid a jump in precious metal prices globally, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous session, the yellow metal had settled at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams.Silver also rose Rs 200 to Rs 75,700 per kilogram. It had closed at Rs 75,500 per kg in the previous trade."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,250/10 grams, up by Rs 100, amid recovery in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst-Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.—*PTI*

TCG forays into food technology space

KOLKATA, 23 JAN

The Chatterjee Group, having interests in petrochemicals and life sciences, has forayed into the food technology space with the launch of Food Technology and Science Institute (FTSI), a company statement said on Tuesday.A wing of the TCG Crest (Centres for Research & Education in Science and Technology), FTSI will be involved in developing high-quality, nutrient-rich food ingredients that is in perfect alignment with the contemporary health-conscious consumer trends, the statement said.FTSI's primary focus will be on plant protein, dietary fibre, and food colours with the mission of extending the shelf-life of the products.For this purpose, FTSI will work in close collaboration with a special purpose subsidiary of MCPI Private Limited, created and dedicated for the development of health foods.—*PTI*

Axis Bank Q3 net profit rises to ₹6,071 crore

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Private sector Axis Bank on Tuesday reported a 4 per cent rise in standalone net profit at Rs 6,071 crore in the third quarter ended December 2023.The bank had earned a net profit of Rs 5,853 crore in the October-December quarter of 2022.The total income of the bank increased to Rs 33,516 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal compared to Rs 26,798 crore in the year-ago period, Axis Bank said in a regulatory filing.In the latest quarter, the bank's interest income rose to Rs 27,961 crore from Rs 22,226 crore in the same period last fiscal.The gross Non-Performing Asset (NPA) ratio improved to 1.58 per cent as of December 31, 2023. In the year-ago period, it stood at 2.38 per cent.Similarly, the net NPA declined to 0.36 per cent as compared to 0.47 per cent at the end of December 2022.During the 2023 December quarter, the bank made a provision of Rs 181.70 crore in respect of investments in its Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs) pursuant to the RBI directive issued on 19 December, 2023.In the third quarter of this fiscal, the bank's Net Interest Income (NII) grew 9 per cent to Rs 12,532 crore while its Net Interest Margin (NIM) stood at 4.01 per cent.—*PTI*

Investors' wealth erodes by ₹8.50 L cr as markets tumble

Among the Sensex firms, IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser and fell 6.13 pc

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at Rs 3,74,48,736.78crore on 20 January *PHOTO: PTI*

- Equity investors became poorer by Rs 8.50 lakh crore on Tuesday as markets came under a bear attack, with the benchmark Sensex falling almost 1,053.10 points. Equity benchmark index Sensex tumbled 1,053 points to close below the 71,000 level on Tuesday, dragged down by index heavyweights HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and SBI amid mixed global cues

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Following the decline in the benchmark index, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 8,50,820.81crore to Rs 3,65,97,915.97 crore.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at Rs 3,74,48,736.78crore on January 20.

Domestic equities opened on a positive note but soon drifted into red witnessing a huge sell-off amid profit booking, said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, MotilalOswal Financial Services Ltd.

Global sentiments turned cautious after a Fitch Group statement that South Asian economies would be most affected, amid rising hostilities in the Red Sea due to Houthi attacks and India's economic forecast faces a significant risk on account of a prolonged spell of disruptions, Khemka said.

Further, the Bank of Japan followed China and kept interest rates unchanged. Now investors are awaiting US GDP data due late today along with the European Central Bank rate decision due later this week. On the domestic front, this week is a truncated week with just three trading days.

Given weak global cues and mixed set of earnings released so far, the market is likely to consolidate and may drop a little further till the next set of fresh positive triggers, Khemka added.

Among the Sensex firms, IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser and fell 6.13 per cent, followed by SBI (3.99 pc), Hindustan Unilever (3.82 pc), Axis Bank (3.41 pc) and HDFC Bank (3.23 pc).

Midcap and smallcap indices witnessed more decline compared to the benchmarks.

The S&P BSE MidCap fell 2.95 per cent to close at 37,247.84 and the midcap index settled 2.79 per cent lower at 43,378.40. All the sectoral indices except healthcare settled with losses.

Realty and services indices fell the most by 5.46 per cent and 4.06 per cent, respectively. While metal declined 3.97 per cent, oil & gas lowered 3.96 per cent and energy went down by 3.70 per cent. —*PTI*

AFTER SONY CUTS TIES

Shares of ZEEL tanked 32.73 per cent to close at Rs 155.90 apiece on the BSE *PHOTO: X*

Zee shares jump 33 pc; mcap falls ₹7,300 cr

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) nosedived up to 33 per cent on Tuesday after Sony called off the proposed USD 10 billion merger of its India unit with the media group.

The market capitalisation of the company, which witnessed heavy selling pressure since morning, tumbled by Rs 7,285.53 crore to Rs 14,974.50 crore on the BSE.

Shares of ZEEL tanked 32.73 per cent to close at Rs 155.90 apiece on the BSE.

On the NSE, the company' shares plunged 30.47 per cent to settle at Rs 160.90 per share.

During the day, the scrip of ZEEL also touched its 52-week low of Rs 152.50 apiece on both BSE and NSE.

The stock also touched its lower price band on both the bourses, which also revised the lower circuit limit for the company on Tuesday.

In volume terms, nearly 1.46 crore equity shares were traded on the BSE while 22.84 crore shares were traded on the NSE, during the day.

The equity market witnessed heavy volatility during the day as the benchmark index Sensex after gaining more than 500 points in early trade, crashed over 1,000 points in the late session to close in the negative territory.

Sensex tumbled 1,053 points to close below the 71,000-level on Tuesday.

On Monday, Culver Max Entertainment, formerly known as Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), terminated merger agreements with Zee Entertainment, which could have otherwise created a USD 10 billion media enterprise in the country.

Besides, Sony has sought USD 90 million as break-up fees for violating the terms of the merger pact and "invoking arbitration", which ZEEL said it will contest legally. —*PTI*

Govt raises import duty on gold, silver

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The government has increased import duty on gold and silver findings and coins to 15 per cent by imposing a 5 per cent Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess (AIDC).

An AIDC of 4.35 per cent has also been levied on 'spent catalyst or ash containing precious metals', said a notification of the Central Board Of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC).

AIDC has been imposed in addition to the basic customs duty of 10 per cent with an aim to bring the incidence of import duty on precious metals at par with bullion.

'Gold or silver findings' means a small component such as hook, clasp, clamp, pin, catch, or screw back, used to hold the whole or a part of a piece of jewellery.

The additional duty came into effect from 22 January.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the government had introduced AIDC cess on certain items to fund agricultural infrastructure. —*PTI*

The government has increased import duty on gold and silver findings and coins to 15 per cent *PHOTO: PTI*

The wholly-owned subsidiary company will be for value-chains of energy business such as greenhydrogen, hydrogen blending *PHOTO: X*

ONGC gets govt nod for green energy, gas unit

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) will set up a new unit to house its gas business and clean energy projects such as green hydrogen, as it looks to fasttrack foray into new areas.In a stock exchange filing, the firm said it last month received approval of the Ministry of Petroleumand Natural Gas for formation of a wholly-owned subsidiary company for gas business and cleanenergy projects."The proposed name of the company is 'ONGC Green Limited' subject to approval of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India," it said, adding the company board at its meeting onTuesday approved the formation of the wholly-owned subsidiary for green energy and gas business.The wholly-owned subsidiary company will be for value-chains of energy business such as greenhydrogen, hydrogen blending, renewable energy (solar, wind and hybrid), biofuels/ biogas business and LNG, ONGC said.

The nation's largest oil and gas producer plans to spend Rs 1 lakh crore on installing 10 GW ofrenewable energy capacity, and setting up two million tonnes of green ammonia annualproduction capacity by 2035 as part of its decarbonisation strategy.ONGC had in February 2021 proposed a separate unit for importing LNG and trading in gas.

The government also sets the price at which it would sell most of the natural gas, which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilizers and turned into CNG for running automobiles or piped to household kitchens for cooking. In the filing, the company also stated that its board has accorded in-principle approval for formation of a joint venture company. —*PTI*

L&T bags 'significant' orders in India, abroad

CHENNAI, 23 JAN

Larson and Turbo (L&T) on Tuesday said that its arm Heavy Engineering has bagged 'significant' orders in the domestic and international markets.

The company did not disclose the value of orders. However, according to company, the value of significant order is between Rs1,000 crore and Rs 2,500 crore.

"L&T Heavy Engineering (HE)'s Modification, Revamp and Upgrade (MRU) business segment has bagged a major order from a key oil and gas customer...for their important debottlenecking project. For the last couple of years, MRU business has concentrated on Middle East opportunities and this order is an important milestone for MRU business in the Middle East," the company said in a filing to BSE.

In another development, MRU business has also secured the Coke Drum critical repair project from (Indian Oil Corporation Ltd) IOCL Gujarat Refinery, according to the filing.

The company has also secured orders for several critical equipment in the process plant equipment segment overseas.

On the domestic front, the company bagged orders to manufacture proprietary design high pressure heat exchangers for a refinery project among others.

Larsen & Toubro is a USD 23 billion Indian multinational engaged in engineering, procurement and construction projects, hi-tech manufacturing and services. —*PTI*

Bharat Innovative Glass Technologies invests ₹1,003 cr in TN

CHENNAI, 23 JAN

US-based Bharat Innovative Glass Technologies Pvt Ltd has planned to setup a new facility at an outlay of Rs 1,003 crore in Tamil Nadu.A memorandum of understanding with the Tamil Nadu government was signed in this connectionin the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday.

Bharat Innovative Glass Technologies Pvt Ltd (BIG TECH) is a joint venture between Optiemus Infracom Ltd and Corning International Corporation. New York-based 172-year-old CorningInternational introduced Corning Gorilla Glass widely used in portable devices like mobile phones,tablets, and laptops.

The Corning Gorilla Glass are known for its damage and scratch resistance, currently featured inmore than 8 billion devices. Bharat Innovative Glass Technologies Pvt Ltd Director Ashok Kumar Gupta exchanged documents with Guidance Tamil Nadu MD and CEO V Vishnu in the presence of Stalin and Minister for Industries TRB Rajaa.

- The Corning Gorilla Glass are known for its damage and scratch resistance, currently featured inmore than 8 billion devices. Bharat Innovative Glass TechnologiesDirector Ashok Kumar Gupta exchanged documents

The proposed manufacturing facility is expected to come up at SIPCOT Pillaipakkam inneighbouringKancheepuram district for the production of cover glass, with an investment of Rs1,003 crore and a potential employment generation of 840 people. Minister for Industries TRB Rajaa said, "Another Global Electronics Giant chooses Tamil Nadu.

Corning International a 172-yearold Fortune 500 company known for pioneering in Material Science and Glass manufacturing is setting foot in Tamil Nadu.

This company is the brain behind the renowned Corning Gorilla Glass, which revolutionised the durability of portable devices like mobile phones, and is an important component in most portable devices today," he said. "AnMoU for this project was signed today in the esteemed presence of our Chief Minister MK Stalin. Such prestigious projects are key to building a vibrant component ecosystem and will help us in attaining our Chief Minister's ambition of a USD 1 trillion economy," he wrote on social media —*PTI*

More firms secure early spots at CIIE 24

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Twenty-three companies had signed up early for the seventh edition in Shanghai on 9 January. Among them are big names such as PepsiCo, Tesla, 3M and Bayer.

"The CIIE facilitates economic and trade cooperation, and has helped PepsiCo know the Chinese market better," said Daniel Shih, vice-president of corporate affairs, APAC and Greater China at PepsiCo.

Highlights of the CIIE in the past six editionsOver the past six years, companies from 173 countries and regions have made appearances in the CIIE and achieved tentative transactions worth $424.23 billion. Last year, six-time CIIE exhibitor Singapore Business Federation (SBF) led a delegation of over 500 business representatives from 56 Singaporean companies to search fresh market opportunities. —*PTI*

CODESHARE PARTNERSHIP

Malaysia Airlines plans to expand in India; eyes deep pact

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

"Bullish on the "important" Indian aviation market, Malaysia Airlines will soon have a deep codeshare partnership with an Indian carrier as well as further expand its operations to the north east and southern destinations in the country," according to a top official.

Malaysia Airlines, the national carrier that is part of the Malaysia Aviation Group, operates a total of 69 weekly flights to nine Indian cities.

In an interview with PTI, Captain Izham Ismail, Group Managing Director of Malaysia Aviation Group, said, "India is an important market for us and we want to be part of the success story of India as a country".

The airline, which has implemented a financial restructuring and is on the revival path, connects nine Indian destinations to Malaysia. The cities are Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Amritsar, Ahmedabad and Thiruvananthapuram.

Apart from crossing its pre-pandemic levels of operations in the Indian market, the carrier, this month, increased its frequency on the Amritsar-Kuala Lumpur route from two to four weekly flights. Currently, the airline has an interline partnership with Vistara.

Bullish on the "important" Indian aviation market, Malaysia Airlines will soon have a deep codeshare partnership with an Indian carrier *PHOTO: PTI*

- Malaysia Airlines, the national carrier that is part of the Malaysia Aviation Group, operates a total of 69 weekly flights to nine Indian cities. The airline, which has implemented a financial restructuring and is on the revival path, connects nine Indian destinations to Malaysia. The cities are Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad and T'puram

An interline arrangement refers to a pact to issue and accept tickets for flights that are operated by the partner airline. When selling an interline ticket, the operating airlines' own flight numbers are used.

"We are at the tail-end of negotiations with one particular airline... Malaysia Airlines is working on having a deep codeshare with an Indian airline," Ismail, who was on a visit to India last week, said. However, specific details were not disclosed.

Codesharing allows an airline to book its passengers on its partner carriers and provide seamless travel to various destinations. Talking about the future plans for the Indian market, Ismail said that in the next two to three years, Malaysia Airlines will be looking at the north east, with flights to Guwahati and Kolkata. The carrier used to fly to Kolkata but stopped the services in 2015. —*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Will have to be accurate against Rohit: Mark Wood

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

England fast bowler Mark Wood on Tuesday said taming Rohit Sharma with judicious use of short-pitched balls will figure highly in his and the team's plans to edge past a dominant-at-home India in the upcoming five-match Test series.The first Test is scheduled to begin here on Thursday and Wood said the nature of pitches even if slow could abet the strategy. Yeah, the conditions will be assessed once I am out there and bumps (bouncers) are rarely bought out here. But the pitch sometimes can be two-paced and if it is slow it can help (bowlers) because the batters will be through with the shot Wood said in a press conference here.Someone like Rohit I know how good he is on the short ball. That doesn t necessarily mean that I wouldn t bowl a bouncer. —*PTI*

Sheikh blames poor umpiring for loss against NZ

KARACHI, 23 JAN

Pakistan hockey team head coach Shahnaz Sheikh has blamed biased and poor umpiring for the defeat against New Zealand in the FIH Olympic qualifiers which ended their chances of making it to the Paris Games.Olympian Shahnaz Sheikh who also manages the team claimed on returning home that Pakistan lost 2-3 to New Zealand because of the inapt umpiring. If it had not been for the umpiring we were in a position to win the match he said. After losing 0-4 to Germany in the semi-finals of the FIH Olympics qualifying tournament in Oman Pakistan was beaten by New Zealand.—*AP*

PHOTO: AP

Sheikh Ahmad's conviction for forgery upheld

GENEVA, 23 JAN

Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah arrives at a Geneva's courthouse ahead of the verdict for a trial for forgery in connection with arbitration, in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, 10 Sept 2021. Long-time Olympic power broker Sheikh Ahmad of Kuwait has had his conviction for forgery upheld on appeal. However a court ruling in Geneva published Monday says the sheikh will not serve jail time for his part in a coup plot to implicate public rivals at home. —*AP*

Brighton held to a frustrating goalless draw by the Wolves

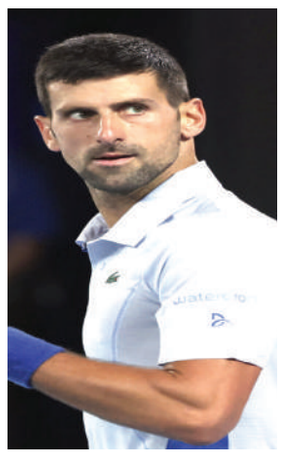
DUBAI, 23 JAN

Brighton failed to score at home for the first time in 23 matches as they were held to a frustrating goalless draw by Wolves at the Amex Stadium.Albion dominated possession in a tetchy Premier League contest but lacked a cutting edge in attack.Wanderers captain Maximilian Kilman hit the frame of his own goal early in the second half, while Pedro Neto, Matheus Cunha, and Mario Lemina went close for the counter-attacking visitors.A largely forgettable encounter was at least memorable for Seagulls midfielder James Milner, whose 633rd Premier League appearance lifted him clear of Ryan Giggs on the competition's all-time list, behind only record holder Gareth Barry. Brighton climbed to seventh, above Manchester United on goal difference, courtesy of the stalemate, while Wolves move level on points with 10th-placed Newcastle. —*AP*

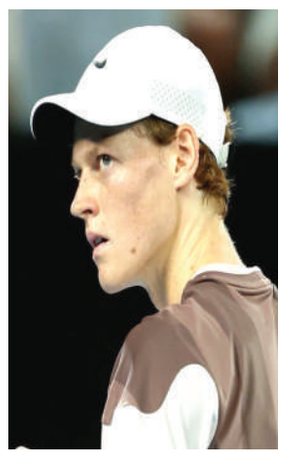
Djokovic holds off Fritz to reach s/fs for 11th time

Coco Gauff to play AO titleholder, Sabalenka in semifinals

MELBOURNE, 23 JAN



Novak Djokovic **PHOTO: X**



J. Sinner **PHOTO: X**

Coco Gauff **PHOTO: AP**

Sabalenka **PHOTO: X**

Nobody has ever been better at the end of the Australian Open than Novak Djokovic, the 10-time champion.

Every time he's won a quarterfinal at Melbourne Park—as he did against Taylor Fritz on Tuesday—he's gone on to win the title.

The odds are usually stacked against his semifinal rival. Perhaps even more so against fourth-seeded Jannik Sinner, who won a quarterfinal over No. 5 Andrey Rublev that didn't start until 10:42 p.m. and didn't finish until 1:21 a.m. Wednesday.

Djokovic reached his record-extending 48th Grand Slam semifinal by beating Fritz 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 in three and 3/4 hours. Their match started late in the heat of the afternoon because U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff's win over Marta Kostuk took more than three hours in the preceding women's quarterfinal on Rod Laver Arena.

In an on-court interview with Australian player Nick Kyrgios, who has been sidelined by a long-term injury, Djokovic made a light-hearted joke about getting popcorn and watching Sinner vs. Rublev on late-night TV.

The most awaited match in Italy - and not only - is areality: after the three matches between the ATP Finals and the Davis Cup onFriday it will be Sinner-Djokovic again, this time in the semifinals inMelbourne.

The blue reaches the 24-time Slam champion thanks to thesuccess in three sets against Rublev. It is the second Slam semifinal inthe South Tyrolean's career after the one he lost at Wimbledon last July.

The mostawaited match of the Australian Open is a reality: on Friday, in thesemi-final, it will once again be Jannik Sinner vs Novak Djokovic,the fourth match in two months against the 24-time Slam champion after the ATPFinals and the Davis Cup.

In a best-of-five-set match, it will be therematch of last July's Wimbledon semi-final and the 2022 fifth-set marathon,also in London, both won by Djoker.

The student of the Vagnozzi-Cahill duoreaches the Serbian thanks to the success against Andrey Rublev in three setswith the score of 6-4 7-6(5) 6-3 in two hours and40 minutes.

In the morning Djokovic hadbeaten Fritz in four sets in three hours and 45 minutes.Sinnerknocks out Rublev on Rod Laver Arena, finishing at 1:22 in the night inMelbourne: the tiebreak of the second set is the emblem of the supremacy of theboy from Sexten who comes back from 1-5 down by scoring six consecutive pointsand driving the no. 5 crazy of the world.

The main draw will start on Sunday 14 January with thefirst matches of the main draw. Only with our digital live streaming-platform will you be able to enjoy total coverage of the courts to follow allyour favorite tennis players with a one-of-a-kind offer.

Coco Gauff hopes she's got her "bad" match out of the way at the Australian Open before meeting defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in the semifinals.

The 19-year-old U.S. Open winner overcame 51 unforced errors, nine double-faults and had just 17 winners to beat Marta Kostyuk 7-6 (6), 6-7 (3), 6-2 Tuesday in a quarterfinal match that lasted 3 hours, 8 minutes.

That long three-setter had a knock-on effect that made for a light but a long night at Melbourne Park. It took Novak Djokovic 3 3/4 hours to hold off Taylor Fritz 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 and reach the Australian Open semifinals for the 11th time.

The first game took 16 minutes, the first set lasted 1 hour, 24 minutes. In the end, top-ranked Djokovic extended his winning streak at Melbourne Park to 33 matches, a tournament record he shares with Monica Seles.

Djokovic is unbeaten in semifinals and finals at the Australian Open, where he's won 10 of his record 24 major titles.

Sabalenka's title defense has been gathering momentum and her 6-2, 6-3 win over No. 9-seeded Barbora Krejcikova was her fifth straight-sets victory in a row.

The extra-long day session pushed the start of the night session back to after 9 p.m. local time, with Krejcikova serving to start the first of the two night quarterfinals at 9:09 p.m. —*PTI*

Former Indian cricketers Ravi Shashtri, Farokh Engineer, and Dilip Vengsarkar during the BCCI Annual Awards, in Hyderabad **PHOTO: PTI**

Shastri, Engineer honoured with Lifetime Achievement Award

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

Breaching Australia's fortress at the Gabba in the iconic Test series of 2021 was the icing on the cake in the illustrious career of multi-faceted Ravi Shastri who was honoured with the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award here on Tuesday.

In a glittering ceremony, the BCCI awarded a host of top men's and women's performers from the 2019-20 season. Alongside Shastri former India wicketkeeper Farokh Engineer too was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Shastri was part of India's World Cup winning squad in 1983 and was the Player of the Series when they bagged the World Series in 1985.

Later as a coach Shastri masterminded India's back-to-back Test series wins in Australia the first Asian side to achieve the feat. Shastri said it was an emotional moment for him and picked the Gabba Test three Australian summers ago among the many highs he experienced in his career.

It is a special evening for me. I think picking one (moment) would be difficult. But I will just go very quickly. You showed one that the 1985 final vs Pakistan was special in Melbourne. 1983 when India won the World Cup.

But in commentary 2007 when they won the T20 World Cup and 2011 when MS hit that ball for six. Two back-to-back wins in Australia. But the icing on the cake was the last day at the Gabba when Rishabh Pant took us past the finishing line said Shastri.

The 61-year-old also lauded the BCCI for looking after him throughout his career. I thank the BCCI for bestowing this honour on me. It's four decades in the game you have not missed a beat and you have been involved with Indian cricket right through. —*PTI*

India knocked out of Asian Cup after losing 0-1

AL KHOR (QATAR), 23 JAN

India crashed out of the Asian Cup football tournament after suffering a 0-1 defeat to Syria in their last group match here on Tuesday. Substitute Omar Khrbin scored the all-important goal in the 76th minute to keep Syria in contention for a knockout round berth. India finished at the bottom of the four-team Group B after losing all three matches without scoring any goal. India had also failed to make it to the knockout round in 1984 2011 and 2019 editions of the tournament. The country had finished runner-up in 1964 when only four teams took part in the continental tournament. —*PTI*

Naorem named Player Of The Year 2023

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Two-time Asian Games medallist Naorem Roshibina Devi was on Tuesday named International Wushu Federation's (IWUF) female athlete of the year in the Sanda category after a month-long public voting.The 23-year-old Roshibina, who won a bronze and a silver in the 2018 and 2022 Asian Games, polled 93545 votes to beat Shahrbano Mansouriyan Semiromi (88179) of Iran and Wu Xiaowei (46753) of China. —*PTI*

Satwik-Chirag pair regains World No. 1 ranking

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Riding on a stellar show in the last two weeks India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty on Tuesday reclaimed the top spot in the BWF men's doubles rankings.

The Asian Games champions reached the world no. 1 ranking for a second time after successive runner-up finishes in the Malaysia Open Super 1000 and India Open Super 750 badminton tournaments. The Indian duo had achieved its numero uno status for the first time after claiming the historic gold medal at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou last year.

Satwik and Chirag who had entered the India Open as the world no 2 lost a tense final against world champions Kang Min Hyuk and Seo Sang Jae here on Sunday.

Among other Indians, HS Prannoy moved a place to reach the world no 8 while Lakshya Sen Kidambi Srikanth and Priyanshu Rajawat stayed at 19th 25th, and 30th spots respectively. —*PTI*

KIYG: Pooja, Tavneet emerge ch'pions in squash

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Tamil Nadu's R Pooja Arthi and Tavneet Singh Mundra (MP) emerged as the girls' and boys' individual champions respectively in the Khelo India Youth Games squash here on Tuesday.

Squash made its debut in the ongoing sixth edition of the national-level KIYG and hosts Tamil Nadu underlined their dominance by powering into the final of both the boys' and girls' team events after securing five out of eight medals (one gold & four bronze) in the individual category.

In the girls' singles final, top seed Pooja edged out Maharashtra second seed Nirupama Dubey 11-6, 7-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-6 in a thriller at the Indian Squash & Triathlon Academy.

Runner-up at last year's National Games, Pooja won the opening game with ease, before Nirpumama leveled with some deft drops and volleys. —*PTI*

MLS FRIENDLY

Messi gets 3 shots on goal in Miami's 1-0 loss

DALLAS, 23 JAN

Lionel Messi had three shots on goal before exiting early in the second half in Inter Miami's 1-0 loss to FC Dallas in an MLS preseason game at the Cotton Bowl on Monday night.

Messi took three shots in the first half and left the game about 15 minutes into the second half with Inter Miami trailing in front of an announced crowd of 32,221 in a game played in a drizzle and 40 degrees (4 Celsius). Forward Jesús Ferreira scored on an uncontested shot three minutes into the match to give FC Dallas an early lead that held up.

Messi's first two shots were saved by goalkeeper Maarten Paes, who dove to his left to deflect Messi's second shot in the 12th minute. Messi's third shot was wide left in the 27th minute.The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner scored twice in Inter Miami's comeback win over FC Dallas on Aug. 6 at Toyota Stadium in the Dallas suburb of Frisco. FC Dallas moved 30 miles north in 2009 after playing its first 13 MLS seasons at the Cotton Bowl, which was a 1994 World Cup venue. "We have a lot of good memories here from 1994 when Holland beat Brazil," said Paes, who is from the Netherlands. "It is very historic and beautiful. I love playing in this stadium. The atmosphere was great and the pitch was perfect."

Lionel Messi #10 of Inter Miami CF shoots against Liam Fraser #18 of FC Dallas during the first half **PHOTO: AP**

- Lionel Messi had three shots on goal before exiting early in the second half in Inter Miami's 1-0 loss to FC Dallas in an MLS preseason game at the Cotton Bowl on Monday night.

Uruguayan star Luis Suárez, who teamed with Messi at FC Barcelona from 2014-20, played in his first match on American soil since joining Inter Miami in December. —*AP*

Virat Kohli and Sunil Gavaskar **PHOTO: PTI**

'Bazball' can fetch me heaps of wickets: Bumrah

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

Jasprit Bumrah cannot relate to the term Bazball but the linchpin of India's pace attack says the much-hyped ultra-aggressive approach that England has pioneered could end up working to his advantage and fetch him heaps of wickets in the upcoming five-match Test series.

England's offensive game plan under coach Brendon McCullum of New Zealand and skipper Ben Stokes will be up against a massive challenge when the side faces India in a seven-week tour. The series opener is slated to start here on Thursday.

I don't relate to the term Bazball Bumrah who boasts of 41 wickets in 10 Tests against England told The Guardian in an interview. But they are playing successful cricket and the aggressive route of taking the opposition on showing the world there's another way to play Test cricket.

In July 2022 Bumrah got a taste of the Bazball when he captained India in Birmingham after Rohit Sharma was ruled out with COVID-19. The match is remembered not just for England's offensive approach in securing a seven-wicket win but also for Bumrah's 29-run onslaught against Stuart Broad in a single over. As a bowler what I think is that it keeps me in play. And if they're going for it playing so fast they won't tire me out I could get heaps (of wickets).

I always think about how I can use things to my advantage. Kudos to them but as a bowler you're in the game he added. I always remind the batters that if they need some advice on playing the pull shot they know where to come Bumrah quipped. Pacers smart captains On his thoughts about captaining India the 36-year-old said: I did one game and it was the utmost honour. Drawing inspiration from Pat Cummins who has excelled as a seam-bowling captain for Australia Bumrah is open to the idea of taking on the leadership mantle in the future.

Playing Test cricket is great captaining was even better. Yes, we lost but we were ahead in the match and I loved the responsibility. Sometimes as a fast bowler, you go down to the fine leg and switch off but I loved being involved in every decision right in the thick of things. And given the opportunity of course who wouldn t (Cummins) plays for Australia the number of matches differs and that kind of thing. Not many (seamers) have done it before. But it's a good example that yes fast bowlers are the smart. —*PTI*

MI to face DC in WPL opener

DC and MI to open the WPL 2024 tournament **PHOTO: WPL-BCCI**

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Defending champions Mumbai Indians will take on last year's finalists Delhi Capitals in the opening match of the second edition of the Women's Premier League at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on 23 February.

The entire season will be held in Bengaluru and Delhi with the Arun Jaitley Stadium here hosting the Eliminator and final on 15 and 17 March respectively. A total of 22 matches will be held in the WPL this year with the table-toppers directly making the final. The second and third placed will lock horns in the Eliminator.

Mumbai Indians led by India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur had defeated Delhi Capitals by seven wickets to win the inaugural WPL.

This edition will see some exciting talents such as Kashvee Gautam and Vrinda Dinesh who had a big payday as a total of 165 players went under the hammer for the 30 spots during the WPL mini-auction last month.

Schedule:

23 February Mumbai Indians vs Delhi Capitals in Bengaluru

24 February - Royal Challengers Bangalore vs UP Warriors in Bengaluru

25 February - Gujarat Giants vs Mumbai Indians in Bengaluru

26 February - UP Warriors vs Delhi Capitals in Bengaluru

27 February - Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Gujarat Giants in Bengaluru

28 February - Mumbai Indians vs UP Warriors in Bengaluru

29 February - Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Delhi Capitals in Bengaluru

1 March - UP Warriors vs Gujarat Giants in Bengaluru

2 March - Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Mumbai Indians in Bengaluru

3 March - Gujarat Giants vs Delhi Capitals in Bengaluru

4 March - UP Warriors vs Royal Challengers Bangalore in Bengaluru

5 March - Delhi Capitals vs Mumbai Indians in Delhi

6 March - Gujarat Giants vs Royal Challengers Bangalore in Delhi

7 March - UP Warriors vs Mumbai Indians in Delhi

8 March - Delhi Capitals vs UP Warriors in Delhi

9 March - Mumbai Indians vs Gujarat Giants in Delhi

10 March - Delhi Capitals vs Royal Challengers Bangalore in Delhi

11 March - Gujarat Giants vs UP Warriors in Delhi

12 March - Mumbai Indians vs Royal Challengers Bangalore in Delhi

13 March - Delhi Capitals vs Gujarat Giants in Delhi

15 March – Eliminator in Delhi 17 March Final in Delhi. —*PTI*